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Finding Hope in Hard Times

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Contact Adam Sanchez at adam@rethinkingschools.org

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BY THE EDITORS OF RETHINKING SCHOOLS

Teaching Hope in Hard Times

What makes public education so dangerous is that it is grounded in hope.

As the editors of our forthcoming *Teaching Palestine: Lessons, Stories, Voices* write, "one of the wonderful things about being an educator is that our work begins with an unshakable belief in the future. To step into a classroom is to express confidence in young people's capacity to learn, to grow, to change, to make a difference — to do good in the world." (See p. 6.)

Even before November's election, these were grim times, with young people experiencing record levels of hopelessness, according to a 2023 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention survey.

No doubt we need to organize for more school counselors, social workers, in-school health professionals — and universal access to health care, including mental health. But we also need to ask: How do we teach for hope in these hard times?

We teach to remember. Times of extraordinary activism and progress have often gone side by side with leaders who have not been on the side of justice. The abolition movement grew and grew during the grimmest days of slavery, under hostile presidents and Supreme Courts. The strike waves of the 1930s began not under the Democrat Franklin Roosevelt, but under the reactionary Herbert Hoover. The Civil Rights Movement was launched with a Republican, Dwight Eisenhower, as president and racist Democrats as governors throughout the South. The Black Panther Party was born in Oakland while Ronald Reagan was governor of California, and the anti-Vietnam War movement became massive under Nixon's presidency. And, of course, the outpouring of activism around racial justice following the

murder of George Floyd occurred during the last presidency of Donald Trump.

We teach to imagine. As Kelly Hayes and Mariame Kaba write in *Let This Radicalize You*, "We know that hope is essential to social change because in order to make change, someone must first imagine that it can be so." And this can happen with the youngest children, as Cristina Paul, Olivia Lozano, and Nancy Villalta demonstrate compellingly in their *Rethinking Schools* article "Community Building as World Building" (Winter 2023–24).

We teach that dramatic social change can emerge unexpectedly, and that fact too can be a source of hope. In her book *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks*, Jeanne Theoharis tells the story of Parks' attendance at a Highlander Center workshop in the summer of 1955. At the end of the workshop, Parks promised to continue her work with young people in Montgomery, Alabama, but predicted "that nothing would happen there because Blacks wouldn't stick together."

Only a few months later, Rosa Parks' prediction was proven wrong by the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which became a foundational struggle in the Civil Rights Movement and launched Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s career as a movement leader. In fact, Black people in Montgomery did "stick together," heroically, and made history. Stories like these — and history is filled with them — show young people that our efforts can turn into more than we can imagine. Using our anger and frustration at the daily injustices we face or witness, we take small steps forward. It can be hard to predict when the next explosion of protest will erupt.

And we teach that hope is not something found, but made. Educators have always created grassroots experiences to defy top-down mandates, share knowledge, and create together. As one teacher wrote after the 2023 Northwest Teaching for Social Justice Conference, which pulled together hundreds of educators at Parkrose High School in Portland, Oregon: It was "a soul-filling, hope-feeling, heart-touching, inspirational experience." The NWTSJ conference was inspired by a similar teacher-organized event in San Francisco many years ago — part of a tradition of radical gatherings to define what we mean by "social justice education."

As the poet June Jordan famously said, "We are the ones we have been waiting for." When people of conscience find each other, these gatherings open new horizons of possibility. Every year the Zinn Education Project — a collaboration of Rethinking Schools and Teaching for Change — sponsors close to 100 study groups around our book *Teaching for Black Lives*. These are the kind of professional gatherings that help us align our values with our educational practice — and generate hope. As one study group participant wrote, "Having a reliable and deeply thoughtful group of allies in my community was so powerful and supportive during this difficult year. I drew strength every day at school knowing that my study group colleagues were there and would be supportive of my practices." It is worth remembering that it was a teacher study group that birthed the Chicago Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators and a version of social justice unionism that continues to inspire teachers throughout the country.

As they face Israel's unrelenting and indiscriminate violence, Palestinians have provided crucial lessons in the practice of hope. In *Teaching Palestine*, we feature the work of the courageous Gazan journalist Bisan Owda. As the genocide in Gaza unfolded, Owda wrote supporters around the world: "We ask you not to lose hope, even if the world seems completely unfair and your efforts have not yet resulted in a ceasefire." Within days of the occupations that erupted across college campuses last school year, displaced Palestinians in Gaza were writing thank you messages on their tents to college students in the United States — who had their own tents torn down by campus and city police. The solidarity between young people in the United States and Palestinians in Gaza was an exercise in creating and sharing hope for a future where genocide would not exist because all people and the planet were valued.

As attacks on anti-racist educators move to places where teachers have built significant networks — whether inside or outside of official unions — organized opposition has a wellspring of hope to draw from. This can be seen in Philadelphia, where several leading educators in the Racial Justice Organizing Committee have been targets of a campaign to label them antisemitic and remove them from the classroom for speaking out about Israel's atrocities (see p. 8). A complaint launched by the Deborah Project — a law firm dedicated to expanding the fight against critical race theory by weaponizing antisemitism — led to the unassignment of award-winning Black Muslim educator Keziah Ridgeway.

But despite this campaign of harassment and being removed from Northeast High School where she had worked for eight years, Keziah told *Rethinking Schools*:

> For someone like me who's so used to never asking for help, I've recently had to. In doing so, it has opened my eyes to the true extent of community that exists. This is the community — built on integrity and respect for life — that will use all the skills at our disposal to build a world free of oppression and welcoming to all.

Building and strengthening these communities of hope is what will get us through. Students need our classrooms to be communities of hope too. Our work with young people — and with each other — needs to demonstrate that another world is possible. Finding, sharing, and teaching hope through these perilous times will help point the way there. ●

"Hope," an excerpt from the introduction to *Teaching Palestine: Lessons, Stories, Voices*

As we look at the history of Palestine-Israel, from the beginning of the Zionist movement to the Nakba to the events today in Gaza and the West Bank, it seems reasonable to despair. But one of the wonderful things about being an educator is that our work begins with an unshakable belief in the future. To step into a classroom is to express confidence in young people's capacity to learn, to grow, to change, to make a difference — to do good in the world. Education is anchored in hope. A book about teaching Palestine is also a book about teaching hope.

Never have there been more people in the world expressing solidarity with Palestine. Never have there been more students demanding justice for Palestinians. Never has there been more consciousness about the ongoing Nakba Palestinians have experienced. There has been a rupture in the silence about Palestine. As Reem Abuelhaj comments in "Talking to Young Children About Gaza" (p. 16 in this issue of the magazine), "I never imagined I would walk through my neighborhood in Philadelphia and see people sitting at coffee shops wearing keffiyehs or see so many Palestinian flags in the windows of my neighbors' homes."

We conclude our chapter on Gaza with "Occupied by Hope," an essay by Palestinian American poet and reporter Noor Hindi:

> When I ask my father, "Is there hope?" his response is swift.
>
> "Of course there is hope."
>
> "From where?" I ask.
>
> "I haven't let go of my hope."
>
> Here is the truth about being Palestinian: In this lifetime, and the one after, and the one thereafter, we will always choose Palestine. There is little that endures more than our hope.
>
> In the face of the unimaginable, this is what I hold on to.

When we teach about Palestine, this too is what we must hold on to. ●

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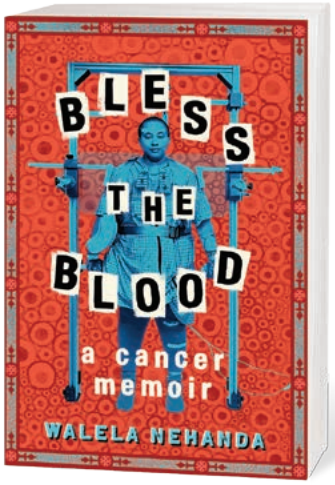

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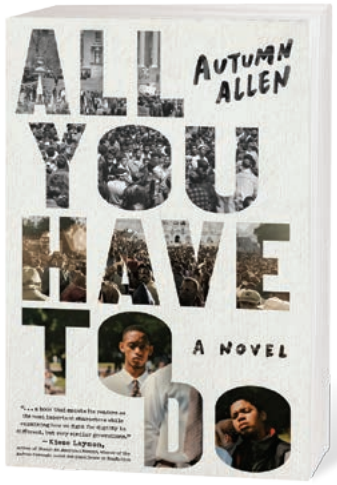

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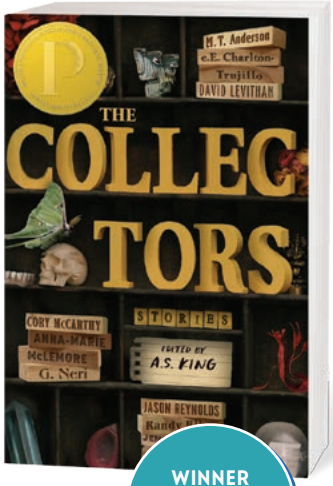

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Defenders of Israel Attempt to Silence Anti-Racist Educators in Philadelphia

By Adam Sanchez

On Feb. 29, 2024, Hannah Gann, a social studies teacher in Philadelphia with extended family in Palestine-Israel, woke up to devastating news.

Adam Sanchez (adam@rethinkingschools.org) is Rethinking Schools' managing editor and edited Teaching a People's History of Abolition and the Civil War. *He is co-editor of Rethinking Schools' newest book,* Teaching Palestine: Lessons, Stories, Voices.

Hours earlier in Gaza, Israeli troops opened fire on a crowd of starving Palestinians in Gaza City as they lined up to receive flour from aid trucks. Israeli soldiers killed at least 112 Palestinians and wounded more than 750 — many of the victims were children.

"It was horrific, and I was upset." Gann remembered. "But it was a big day at my school. Our students give a presentation each trimester in lieu of final exams. It was presentation day, and their families were coming to watch, so I had to pull myself together." When Gann arrived at her school, she realized the water fountains weren't working, so she quickly went on Instacart to have bottles of water sent to the school so her students would have something to drink while presenting.

During student presentations, a colleague came into Gann's classroom and asked, "Is that your truck outside?" Confused, Gann went to the window and saw a large billboard truck parked outside the school. The truck had a picture of Gann wearing a keffiyeh and next to it the words "Hannah Gann: 10th Grade Teacher & Philadelphia's Leading Antisemite." The mobile billboard was sent by Accuracy in Media, a right-wing group that receives most of its funding from the richest person in Pennsylvania, billionaire Republican donor and school choice proponent Jeff Yass.

Once her students were finished with their presentations, Gann went out to plead with the driver. "I'll give you my address if you want to take the truck there," she offered, "but our students are

PHOTOS: KATHERINE RILEY


Teach Palestine,
Teach Black History,
Indigenous & Ethnic Studi
Teach Truth

about to dismiss, and please don't be parked outside when they do because they are not a part of this and they don't deserve to be made a part of this." Gann's biggest concern was that her students, most of whom were Black, wanted to come to her defense. "I was fully aware that whoever has the money to pay for a billboard truck like that would not hesitate to prosecute a Black teenager who did anything to that truck," she remembered. According to Gann, the truck driver responded, "I'm getting paid $1,500 a day to be here. There's nothing you can tell me that's going to make me mess with that kind of money."

Gann was upset. "If these outside organizations were really concerned about the safety of my students," she thought, "shouldn't they be using their money to make sure they have clean drinking water instead of harassing me?" When she realized another person was filming the conversation, it became obvious the point was to provoke anger and film her reaction. Gann went back into the building, explained the tactic to her students, and encouraged them to ignore the truck.

Gann is one of several leading anti-racist teachers in Philadelphia targeted for their opposition to Israel's genocide in Gaza and their support for Palestinians. Although defenders of Israel have long used false accusations of antisemitism to discredit supporters of Palestinians, this repression has intensified over the last year.

From the Racial Justice Organizing Committee to Philly Educators for Palestine

Most educators in Philadelphia being accused of antisemitism are part of an organization called the Racial Justice Organizing Committee (RJOC). RJOC began as a subcommittee within the Caucus of Working Educators (WE) — a caucus within the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers devoted to social justice unionism. RJOC members planned the

first Black Lives Matter Week of Action in Philadelphia during the 2016–2017 school year. In 2021, after years of organizing by RJOC, the Philadelphia school board signed on to the week of action, making it an official school district event.

RJOC activism compelled the school district to create a district-wide Equity Coalition, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) positions at several schools, and a school district DEI office. RJOC also successfully pressured the district to adopt Indigenous People's Day and release racial demographics of employees to press the need to hire more teachers of color. When the COVID-19 pandemic shut down Philadelphia schools, a city with one of the country's highest poverty rates, RJOC member Keziah Ridgeway proposed distributing food and necessities at city schools. Groceries 4 Philly distributed $60,000 of needed goods.

Hannah Gann had joined RJOC when she moved to Philadelphia in 2018. After visiting Palestine during the summer of 2023 and participating in a West Bank tour led by Breaking the Silence, an organization of former Israeli soldiers focused on exposing the public to the reality of the occupation, Gann came up with the idea of organizing a training for teachers.

When Israel responded to the Oct. 7 Hamas attack by unleashing a genocidal campaign on Gaza, the need for such a training intensified. Two other RJOC members, Shaw MacQueen and Keziah Ridgeway, prepared an optional training on the history of Palestine and the current conflict for a district professional development day. Although the workshop was initially approved, after it appeared on the professional development catalog, district officials asked MacQueen and Ridgeway to remove "genocide" from the title. But the same day, before MacQueen and Ridgeway had an opportunity to respond, they were notified the workshop was canceled.

Without school district support, Gann, MacQueen, and Ridgeway began planning a teach-in for educators.

The Repression of Baldi Teachers

On Nov. 15, 2023, Israeli forces raided Al-Shifa hospital, Gaza's largest medical facility. In addition to the patients and medical staff, 2,000 to 3,000 displaced Palestinians were seeking shelter in the building. Thirty-six premature babies had to be taken off incubators because Israeli bombs had earlier destroyed the station supplying them oxygen.

On the same day in Philadelphia, a group of Palestinian students gathered after school in Caroline Yang's classroom at Baldi Middle School to create posters to support a ceasefire. Yang was joined by teachers Emily Antrilli and Jordan Kardasz. Philadelphia has the fourth largest Palestinian community in the United States; Baldi has a substantial Palestinian and Muslim population.

Some Palestinian students had approached Yang, Antrilli, and Kardasz asking why there was no Palestinian flag — but there was an Israeli flag — flying in the school common area's flags of the world display. Students pointed out the lack of support for Palestinians compared to the outpouring of support at Baldi for Ukrainians the previous year. Students also brought up concerns about teachers who they thought treated them unfairly because they were Palestinian.

Yang, Antrilli, and Kardasz met on the school's equity team. "Had it been a group of queer students who felt uncomfortable there wasn't a GSA, I think we would have done the same thing, it just happened to be a group of Palestinian students in the middle of a genocide," Kardasz said. "We wanted to be allies to them and let them know that they had teachers who they could feel safe around and talk with about what was happening in Palestine."

The teachers began holding a space for Palestinian and Muslim students to talk after school and students wanted to create posters to hang in the commons alongside a Palestinian flag. Worried about what Kardasz called "a punitive environment toward students" at Baldi, and wanting to protect students from reprisal, the teachers hung the posters on students' behalf. Within an hour, school administrators removed the posters. Four days later the teachers received notice that they were under disciplinary investigation. All three were shocked. "I assumed this would start a conversation, not disciplinary action," Yang told Al-Bustan News Service.

All three teachers were new and untenured. They approached their school's union representatives for support and were refused. They later found out from the testimony submitted during their disciplinary investigation that Jewish members of the building committee expressed distress over a poster that used the phrase "from the river to the sea" and that their building representative advocated to the administration on behalf of those members to ensure the incident was "not being swept under the rug." The investigation ended with recommendations of five days unpaid suspension, mandatory DEI coaching, and a transfer to another school at the end of the year.

In January, looking for support, they attended the Palestine teach-in organized by Gann, MacQueen, Ridgeway, and others. Out of the teach-in emerged Philly Educators for Palestine (PEFP).

A Student Podcast Sparks Repression and Organizing

The next month, after the International Court of Justice ruled that it was "plausible" Israel had committed genocide and as Israel prepared for a ground invasion of Rafah, the repression of students and teachers in Philadelphia intensified.

At Northeast, Philadelphia's largest and most diverse high school, Keziah Ridgeway asked her African American history students to compare a modern-day Indigenous or oppressed group who used art as resistance with Black people's use of spirituals and poetry. Two students created a podcast using Palestinian art. Ridgeway thought the podcast was outstanding and would contribute to the school's Black History Month assemblies. She sent the podcast to the school principal who approved playing it. But another teacher who attended the first assembly claimed the podcast was antisemitic and forwarded it to a newly formed organization, the Jewish Family Association. Although the podcast

Pro-Palestinian student display at Baldi Middle School before school administrators took it down.

did not mention Jews or Zionism, they launched an email campaign to district officials arguing the focus on Palestinian resistance implied that Jewish people were the oppressor.

District officials removed the video from the remaining assemblies. "It was gut-wrenching for me," Ridgeway told Al-Bustan News Service. "You never want to tell a child who has put in that much time and effort that you can't show it to the school because some adults were uncomfortable. . . . I cried a lot that day."

The Jewish Family Association partnered with the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia to pressure the school board to act against teachers they deemed antisemitic. Jewish Family Association members wrote, calling for Ridgeway's removal, arguing that she "cannot continue to incite violence and indoctrination against Jewish students and faculty." On behalf of the Jewish Family Association, the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights.

In July, the ADL filed its own Title VI complaint. In the complaint, the ADL advocates for the "suspension and expulsion" of students and the "suspension and termination" of teachers, who the ADL deems to have engaged in "discriminatory conduct." The ADL scrutinizes three unnamed teachers' social media posts and asserts that when these teachers use the term "Zionists" on their social media, it is "an ill-disguised code word for Jews." They offer no evidence for this. Using this framework, the ADL then deems posts such as "Zionism is racism" as antisemitic. The complaint also criticizes posts that are simply critical of Israel and encourage others to protest. (For example, one post they use as evidence simply states, "Until the Israeli regime's genocidal assault on Gaza stops, we should keep protesting and disrupting in every way possible.") Canary Mission, a blacklisting and doxxing operation funded by wealthy pro-Israel supporters, including pro-Trump Islamophobic billionaire Sanford Diller, revealed in their "investigation" that the three unnamed teachers were Gann, MacQueen, and Ridgeway — the RJOC members who had led the teach-in back in January.

The ADL complaint also targets Ismael Jimenez, one of the founding members of RJOC who had become the director of social studies curriculum, because of a social media post he made in 2020 that read "Israel is a terrorist state" and for stating in a recent podcast that he viewed part of his job as fighting for the rights of educators to "teach about the genocide in Palestine." In June, an Accuracy in Media mobile billboard with a big photo of Jimenez, describing him as a "leader of hate" and arguing "This is why Pennsylvania families deserve school choice," spent the day outside the school district headquarters where Jimenez worked. The truck later parked across the street from Jimenez's row house blasting an audio track that repeated "shame" over and over.

But the attacks on Philadelphia's leading anti-racist educators have galvanized supporters. After the podcast incident, PEFP circulated a petition with six demands for the school board, including condemning the genocide, protecting students and teachers under attack, defending the right to teach the history of Palestine, and providing professional development for teachers about the topic. Pro-Palestinian educators, students, and parents began attending school board meetings to express their concern over what was happening — culminating in a protest of hundreds at the May 30 school board meeting.

Protesters gathered outside the School District of Philadelphia headquarters holding banners reading "Ceasefire Now!" and the names of the hundreds of destroyed Gazan schools. In a video created for the social justice media project POPPYN, a student journalist interviewed attendees at the protest. Central High School teacher Tom Quinn argued that the attack on teachers "is an excuse to shut down people trying to teach the truth in the classroom."

Student speakers at the school board meeting described a hostile anti-Palestinian environment at Northeast High School and across the district. Two Black

Muslim sisters at Northeast described being photographed by a pro-Israel teacher for a pin they wore supporting human rights in Sudan and Palestine. Another student described how a teacher had given a Palestinian student detention for refusing to apologize after the teacher overheard the student tell a friend that his family was "trapped in a concentration camp" in Gaza. "I walk into school, and so does every Palestinian student I know, being uncomfortable," testified Northeast student Amir Mohammad. "For the teachers at my school, even the mention of my family and the brutalities they face is more than enough for me to be punished immediately." A Jewish student at Masterman Middle School described a teacher being reprimanded for a "Free Palestine" sign on her desk. "I too support a free Palestine," the student said to the school board. "And I felt like my ability to say what I believe was taken from me."

Shaw MacQueen, Keziah Ridgeway, Hannah Gann, and fellow teacher Kristin Kelly pose during the Palestine teach-in they organized in January 2024.

The Struggle to Reinstate Ridgeway

As the 2024–25 school year began and the World Health Organization launched a campaign to vaccinate Gazan children against polio, a new complaint was launched against Ridgeway. The Deborah Project — headed by a former Trump lawyer and dedicated to expanding the fight against critical race theory by weaponizing antisemitism, filed the complaint on behalf of the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia. The complaint takes several of Ridgeway's social media posts out of context. For example, in September, Ridgeway asked on Instagram whether anyone knew of any Black-owned gun shops in Philadelphia. "After a close family member's house was broken into, months of being harassed and targeted on social media by Zionists, and moving to a new part of the city after living Uptown for 20 years, I felt vulnerable and anxious and wanted to protect my family," Ridgeway stated. In another post she quotes the Cash Box Kings lyric "Ain't no fun when the rabbit got the gun." The Deborah Project strings these posts together with others to argue Ridgeway is making "threats of violence against members of the Philadelphia Jewish community." Within hours of the complaint being filed, an article reinforcing the Deborah Project's complaint appeared on the website of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. By the end of the day, Ridgeway had been unassigned from her classroom pending an investigation.

Teachers, parents, and students across the city rallied to Ridgeway's defense. A petition asking for Ridgeway to be reinstated quickly garnered more than 2,750 signatures. Philadelphia Parents for Palestine published dozens of letters in support of Ridgeway. "This is exactly what we were raised to be afraid of," said Rouz Lami, a Palestinian parent of three Northeast High School students. "If Ms. Ridgeway doesn't go back, what does that show our kids? It shows you really have to stop talking about Palestine or you can lose your job."

On Oct. 24, Ridgeway's supporters shut down the school board meeting demanding she be reinstated. Before supporters took over the meeting unfurling a large "Reinstate Ridgeway" banner, students, parents, and educators spoke powerfully to Ridgeway's record. Northeast teacher Katherine Riley told the board Ridgeway's "removal from the classroom at the behest of outside groups has essentially halted her students' education for nearly seven weeks." She also called for the resignation of school board member Joan Stern, "whose role as a trustee with the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia — the primary complainant against Mrs. Ridgeway that triggered her removal — presents a conflict of interest." Central High School teacher Nick Palazzolo also testified about Ridgeway:

> When the pandemic forced schools to close in 2020, Keziah did not throw her hands up as so many did. She got to work with

> Liz Wesley and launched a virtual class teaching African American history to students from across the city. Later that same year, we witnessed many of our students advocating for anti-racist policies in their schools. Keziah worked with Hannah Gann to mentor these students in a citywide Black Student Union. . . . This is who you removed from Northeast. A teacher who cares passionately for students, their minds, and their well-being. . . . For years I have been reading about book bans and teachers being fired for assigning authors like Ta-Nehisi Coates. But not in Philly. Not until this year.

Jethro Heiko, a Jewish Northeast high school parent, explained that the year his daughter took Ridgeway's class she "had literally the best school year of any sophomore I've ever encountered." He added, "The fact that now at Northeast High sophomores and juniors started their school year with seven weeks absent of one of the best teachers in our district is unacceptable."

On Nov. 21, 2024, the same day the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his former defence minister Yoav Gallant, Ridgeway's supporters again spoke out at the Philadelphia school board meeting. Facing new regulations prohibiting "signs on sticks" and "noisemakers," supporters repeatedly played the video podcast that Ridgeway's students had created — and the school district had censored — both inside the meeting room and on a projector outside the building.

Students from Northeast High School again spoke powerfully. "After months of speakers, especially students, testifying for Ms. Keziah Ridgeway, you still choose to listen to outside groups that have no affiliation to me or any other student at Northeast High School," said Hazel Heiko.

"There are very few teachers who openly advocate for and support Palestinian and Muslim students. Without [Ridgeway] in the school, these students feel unsafe," expressed Sophia Thompson. "You say you want to support the students of Philadelphia, yet you are the core of these problems that students at my school face."

A final decision about Ridgeway's removal is expected in early 2025. In a letter obtained by *Rethinking Schools*, more than 50 Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT) members called on their union leadership to take a more "public stand to support our fellow PFT members who are under attack for teaching truth."

Yang, Antrilli, and Kardasz resigned after being disciplined for supporting Palestinian students and filed a Title VI complaint accusing the district of discriminating against Palestinians. After their story was told in *the Intercept* supporters showed up at December school board meetings holding copies of the censored student posters.

"You took teachers away from their classroom wrongfully, but you can't take away their love for the youth and the hope that they bring to us," high school student Aster Chau told the school board. "To all the teachers . . . you are not defeated because you have us and we have you."

Breaking Through the Backlash

The attacks on social justice educators in Philadelphia are part of a national trend. A survey of 467 school superintendents found that U.S. public schools have spent $3.2 billion during the 2023–24 school year fending off right-wing campaigns. These attacks support efforts to privatize public schools by removing outstanding educators from the classroom during a teacher shortage and diverting resources from public schools starved for funds.

Philadelphia is just one example of pro-Israel activists bringing the war on teaching truth into blue cities previously untouched by campaigns against teaching about racism. Seattle is another. Accuracy in Media mobile billboards have targeted anti-racist teachers there as well. In the lead-up to the 17th annual Northwest Teaching for Social Justice Conference, one of the largest regional K–12 social justice teaching conferences in the country, pro-Israel activists made calls and sent letters to Seattle and Washington state officials — including Gov. Jay Inslee — imploring them to cancel the conference because of its focus on teaching Palestine. (The conference went on as scheduled, attracting almost 700 educators.)

This new McCarthyism must be exposed and stopped. It's also crucial that we find ways to keep hope alive through these tough times. Hannah Gann draws hope both from the Palestinians who continue to struggle for freedom despite overwhelming odds and from the past. "As a history teacher, I know how many generations it took to tear down certain structures of oppression," Gann said. "I think about enslaved people in the United States who made freedom quilts to pass down to their children, and their children, with the radical hope that one day these quilts would be inherited by a generation that was free."

For Keziah Ridgeway, hope comes from the community forged in struggle:

> What gives me hope in challenging times is the beautiful community of like-minded people that surround me . . . parents, students, friends, and family members who allow their morals and integrity to be a guiding light in these perilous times. For someone like me who's so used to never asking for help, I've recently had to. In doing so, it has opened my eyes to the true extent of community that exists. This is the community — built on integrity and respect for life — that will use all the skills at our disposal to build a world free of oppression and welcoming to all. ●

Talking to Young Children About Gaza

By Reem Abuelhaj

Fundamental to our work as educators and caretakers of children is an obligation to tell young people the truth about the world and give them tools to take action.

For those of us in a wave of grief as we watch Palestinian children be killed and injured, starved, and denied medical care, it has been challenging to know whether and how to engage with the young children in our lives about what is going on. As a Palestinian American elementary school teacher, I found myself unable to look at the 1st and 2nd graders in my classroom without seeing the faces of Gazan children of the same ages. This is a deeply painful time.

Many schools and educational institutions have adopted policies and practices that silence educators from talking about Palestine and Israel under threat of penalty or losing employment. Many adults have chosen not to have conversations with their children about Israel's genocide in Gaza for fear that it will be too overwhelming or scary.

However, young children already hear about the genocide in Gaza or even see images of Gaza under siege that pervade social media and the news. Whether from the back seat of the car while a family member listens to the radio, overhearing grown-ups discussing the news in hushed tones from another room, attending a protest, or even hearing a friend make a reference at school, many young people already sense that something bad is happening in a place called Gaza.

For young children, and all of us, knowing something bad and scary is happening but not having the information they need to understand it generates fear and a feeling of being out of control. Giving children information they need to understand hard and scary events in developmentally appropriate ways supports them to feel agency and a sense of emotional safety.

Rather than remain silent when children have questions about Gaza, educators and caregivers of young children can give these young people tools to think critically about the world and take meaningful action to build a world where everyone has what they need to thrive.

It is not always possible to prepare for a conversation about a tricky topic with a young child. Sometimes a child makes a statement or brings up a question that requires immediate response. Remember, we can always say: "I want to think about how to answer that. Can we talk about this again later?" The most important thing is to show the child, with our words and our affect, that we are

ILLUSTRATION: SOPHIA FOSTER-DIMINO

open to answering their questions.

Below are seven guidelines for conversations between adults and young children about Gaza.

1. Start with what they know. We can respond to a child's question with another question. For example, if a child asks "Why are people bombing Gaza?" we might respond "I'm so glad you asked that question. What have you heard about what's happening in Gaza?"

2. Listen and mirror the language the child is using. Children will use language that they can understand and process. It is the adult's job to listen to the language children use as an indication of their developmental understanding. If a child says "They are hurting kids in Gaza," we don't need to use the word "kill." Instead, we can mirror that language back: "Yes, the Israeli army is hurting kids in Gaza, and that is unfair and wrong." If a child says "People in Gaza don't have enough food," we don't need to use the word "starve." Rather, we can build on this understanding: "Right, people in Gaza don't have enough food to be healthy right now, because Israel is stopping more food from coming into Gaza."

3. Use concrete, clear, direct language. Think about breaking big concepts into building blocks that the child can understand. Think about using words they already have references for. For example, young children will not understand the term "genocide," but they can understand that "a group of people or an army are trying to hurt a lot of people from one place."

4. Help the child differentiate their experience from the experience of people in Gaza. If the child asks "Will Israel bomb us here?" we might respond "No. That isn't going to happen. Here we are safe from bombs. And we can work for a world where everyone is safe from bombs."

5. Check in and affirm feelings (ours and the child's). Conversations about violence and oppression are too often intellectualized by people not directly impacted. As adults, it's our job to help children notice the feelings that come up and find ways to articulate and work with them. We can also be honest with the child about how we're feeling. Children are often aware of our emotions even when we don't name them. We can name our feelings directly in a way that does not put the child in a position of being our caretaker. For example, if a child asks "Do you feel sad about Gaza?" we might respond "Yeah, I do feel sad. I feel that in my heart. Where do you feel it in your body?" After the child responds we might affirm "Yeah, sometimes I feel it there too," and ask "What are some things we can do when we feel sad?"

6. Make clear moral statements. It is OK, and important, to make clear moral statements about social issues. Young children are oriented to justice, and in a world pervasive with oppression it is important for adults to name it. We can make statements like "All people deserve to have food, water, and medicine" and "It is wrong to stop people from getting food."

7. Give the child a way to take action. One of the most important elements of a conversation with a young child about hard truths is to offer them a sense of agency and opportunities for action. In my classroom, for example, I always pair conversations about climate change, a terrifying and inevitable issue, with lessons about climate justice organizing. Young children need to know there are ways to fight back against injustice in the world, and that they can participate in taking action. By offering them ways of taking action that bring them into the collective (e.g., making protest signs with friends or participating in a letter-writing day), we can use a moment of injustice as an opportunity to build solidarity and community. We can say "It's our job to help change what's happening in Gaza. Some ways we can do that are making art for the protest this weekend, or getting our friends to write letters to the people in charge of our country to tell them to stop sending weapons to Israel."

Recently I was having coffee with an acquaintance who said about the genocide in Gaza, "I never imagined this would be happening." I responded that, sadly, as a Palestinian American whose family has been impacted by Israel's escalating military occupation of Palestine, I had known this was possible. However, what I never imagined I would see in my lifetime is the level of resistance and solidarity with the Palestinian people that has erupted in the United States and around the world since Oct. 7, 2023. I never imagined I would walk through the streets of my neighborhood in Philadelphia and see people sitting at coffee shops wearing keffiyehs or see so many Palestinian flags in the windows of my neighbors' homes.

In such an unprecedented moment of resistance, we must take seriously the young people who will inherit the struggle for liberation. Giving young children language for understanding the truth about oppression, the tools to fight injustice, and the resources to build communities that can live in collective freedom is world-changing work. I invite you to imagine, when children across the world today are having these conversations and developing these tools and resources, what more liberatory futures could be possible. ●

Reem Abuelhaj is an elementary school educator and community organizer in Philadelphia. Her work focuses on developing and implementing abolitionist practices in the elementary school classroom and supporting young children to learn concrete organizing skills so they can build a more free world.

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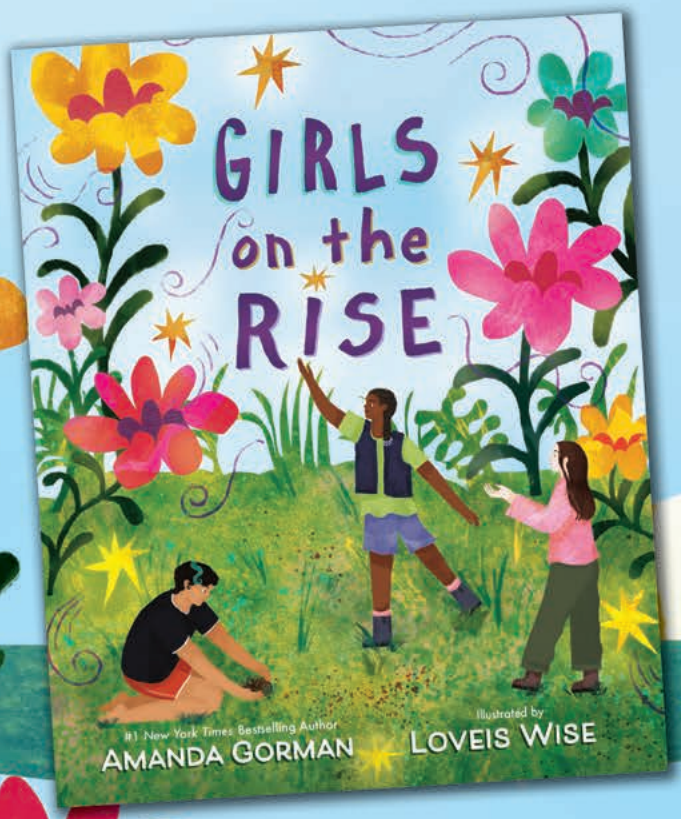

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Excerpts from *Teaching Palestine*'s Poetry Teaching Guide

By Linda Christensen

But I Heard the Drops

By Sharif S. Elmusa

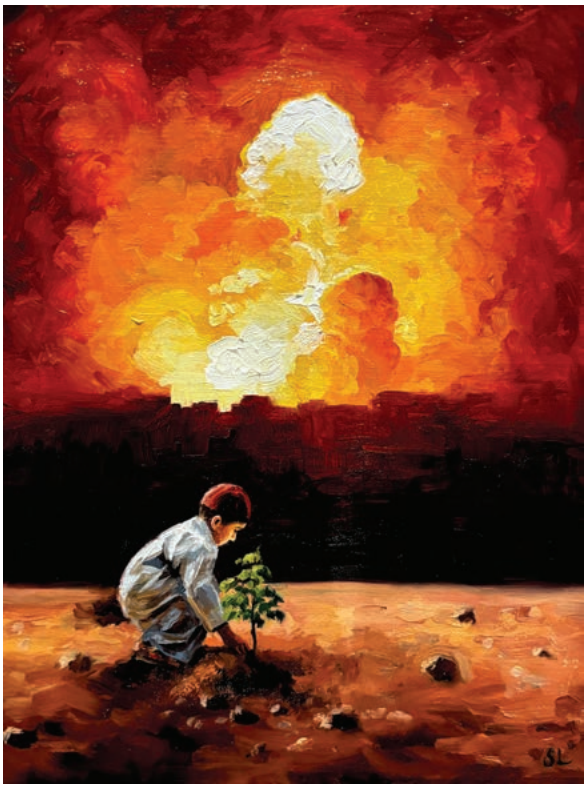
My father had a reservoir
of tears.
They trickled down
unseen.
But I heard the drops
drip
from his voice
like drops
from a loosened tap.
For 30 years
I heard them.

Sharif S. Elmusa is a scholar, poet, and writer. He is co-editor of Grape Leaves: A Century of Arab American Poetry *and author of* Flawed Landscape: Poems 1987–2008. *Elmusa grew up in the refugee camp of Nuweimeh, near Jericho, after his family was expelled from their village in 1948. Until 1948 his father grew figs, grapes, and oranges outside Jaffa.*

Teaching Idea for "But I Heard the Drops"

Tell students: Given what you've learned about Palestine-Israel, think about why the poet's father cries. On your own, make a list of reasons a Palestinian might cry. Share reasons with the class. With a partner, write a poem that may begin "For 30 years, I cried" and tell who, what, or why they cried. You may choose to use lines from the original poem to move your poem forward, e.g., "They trickled down . . ."

ILLUSTRATIONS: SAFIA LATIF



If I Must Die

By Refaat Alareer

If I must die,
you must live
to tell my story
to sell my things
to buy a piece of cloth
and some strings,
(make it white with a long tail)
so that a child, somewhere in Gaza
while looking heaven in the eye
awaiting his dad who left in a blaze —
and bid no one farewell
not even to his flesh
not even to himself —
sees the kite, my kite you made, flying up above
and thinks for a moment an angel is there
bringing back love
If I must die
let it bring hope
let it be a tale

Refaat Alareer was a professor of world literature and creative writing at the Islamic University of Gaza and the editor of Gaza Writes Back: Short Stories from Young Writers in Gaza, Palestine. *He was killed by an IDF air strike on Dec. 6, 2023, along with his brother, nephew, his sister, and her three children.*

Teaching Idea for "If I Must Die"

Refaat Alareer, a prominent Palestinian professor, poet, and writer, was killed in an air strike in northern Gaza, on Dec. 6, 2023. His brother, nephew, his sister, and her three children were also killed. In interviews before his death, he discussed the inhumane choices he and his wife and their six children faced: Stay in Gaza and risk death or flee without anywhere to go that was safe. "It's an archetypal Palestinian image of a discussion, a debate on should we stay in one room, so if we die, we die together, or should we stay in separate rooms, so at least somebody can live?"

In interviews, in writing, in his work with youth, Alareer attempted to bring the humanity of Palestinians to the world. "Feel their pain. Put yourself in their shoes." He edited *Gaza Writes Back: Short Stories from Young Writers in Gaza, Palestine* (2014), a collection of 15 stories written by young Gazans living under Israeli occupation since 2009. He also co-edited *Gaza Unsilenced*, a 2015 collection of essays, photos, and poetry. He was a co-founder of We Are Not Numbers — a nonprofit organization that aims to amplify the voices of Palestinian youth living in Gaza and the refugee camps. Anticipating his death, he wrote the poem "If I Must Die." The poem is read by Scottish actor Brian Cox on *Democracy Now!*; images of air strikes play alongside the poem.

To understand the heartbreak of writing a poem in anticipation of death, students need to know about the author, his life, and his work. The best place to learn about him is at the We Are Not Numbers website, where students can read tributes to him from his students.

Lift Refaat Alareer's work of making Gaza visible by directing students to read the stories and poems he helped students construct. Ask students to wander through both the stories and the poetry section of the We Are Not Numbers website and read a few stories and poems. At the website, encourage students to note lines or phrases or entire pieces to share with the class. What do they learn about conditions in Gaza? What else do they want to know? After students share their findings in small groups or the whole class, ask them to write a one-page commentary about what they learned: Encourage them to include lines from the pieces as well as their own feelings. What should people know about living in Gaza?

Gate A-4

By Naomi Shihab Nye

Naomi Shihab Nye is a poet, songwriter, and novelist. She is the author of numerous books of poetry.

This poem is included in Honeybee: Poems & Short Prose.

Wandering around the Albuquerque Airport Terminal, after learning my flight had been delayed four hours, I heard an announcement: "If anyone in the vicinity of Gate A-4 understands any Arabic, please come to the gate immediately."

Well — one pauses these days. Gate A-4 was my own gate. I went there.

An older woman in full traditional Palestinian embroidered dress, just like my grandma wore, was crumpled to the floor, wailing. "Help," said the flight agent. "Talk to her. What is her problem? We told her the flight was going to be late and she did this."

I stooped to put my arm around the woman and spoke haltingly. "Shu-dow-a, Shu-bid-uck Habibti? Stani schway, Min fadlick, Shu-bit-se-wee?" The minute she heard any words she knew, however poorly used, she stopped crying. She thought the flight had been canceled entirely. She needed to be in El Paso for major medical treatment the next day. I said, "No, we're fine, you'll get there, just later, who is picking you up? Let's call him."

We called her son, I spoke with him in English. I told him I would stay with his mother till we got on the plane and ride next to her. She talked to him. Then we called her other sons just for the fun of it. Then we called my dad and he and she spoke for a while in Arabic and found out of course they had 10 shared friends. Then I thought just for the heck of it why not call some Palestinian poets I know and let them chat with her? This all took up two hours.

She was laughing a lot by then. Telling of her life, patting my knee, answering questions. She had pulled a sack of homemade mamool cookies — little powdered sugar crumbly mounds stuffed with dates and nuts — from her bag — and was offering them to all the women at the gate. To my amazement, not a single woman declined one. It was like a sacrament. The traveler from Argentina, the mom from California, the lovely woman from Laredo — we were all covered with the same powdered sugar. And smiling. There is no better cookie.

And then the airline broke out free apple juice from huge coolers and two little girls from our flight ran around serving it and they were covered with powdered sugar, too. And I noticed my new best friend — by now we were holding hands — had a potted plant poking out of her bag, some medicinal thing, with green furry leaves. Such an old country tradition. Always carry a plant. Always stay rooted to somewhere.

And I looked around that gate of late and weary ones and I thought, This is the world I want to live in. The shared world. Not a single person in that gate — once the crying of confusion stopped — seemed apprehensive about any other person. They took the cookies. I wanted to hug all those other women, too. This can still happen anywhere. Not everything is lost.

Teaching Idea for "Gate A-4"

Naomi Shihab Nye is a Palestinian American poet who grew up in both Jerusalem and San Antonio, Texas. Nye has said that, for her, "the primary source of poetry has always been local life, random characters met on the streets, our own ancestry sifting down to us through small essential daily tasks." In this lovely prose poem, Nye brings the kindness of the world into focus while describing an incident at an airport. Through the poem, she also explores Palestinian culture.

Consider watching Naomi Shihab Nye reading the poem in a National Endowment for the Arts YouTube video before discussing the poem with students. After they've listened and read the poem on their own, ask what they learn from this moment of kindness, what they think it reveals about Palestinian culture.

Nye writes, "This is the world I want to live in. The shared world. . . . This can still happen anywhere. Not everything is lost." Invite students to write about a time they witnessed kindness. Begin by asking them to list moments of kindness and generosity. These might include incidents they experienced personally or that they watched unfold. Share those incidents to encourage more memories to surface. These are often small moments, so they need time to bubble up. Once students have lists, ask them to choose one and write. These may be in the form of a prose poem or a narrative. After they write, share these pieces and discuss what they have in common. How can they make these moments happen more frequently? What needs to change in our society — and in the world — to make these more common?

ILLUSTRATION: HALIMA AZIZ

Because of Us

By Em Berry

This morning I learned
The English word gauze
(finely woven medical cloth)
Comes from the Arabic word […] Ghazza
Because Gazans have been skilled weavers for centuries

I wondered then

how many of our wounds
have been dressed
because of them

and how many of theirs
have been left open
because of us

Em Berry (@skinhungry) is an independent writer, poet, and artist from Aotearoa — New Zealand. An audio-visual representation of this poem was published by Al Jazeera *and can be seen at https://youtu.be/TkdMCrNec5I.*

Teaching Idea for "Because of Us"

Em Berry's opening "This morning I learned . . ." is an evocative first line to pull students into their own writing. Ask students to write the words "This [morning/week/month/year] I learned . . ." and then quick-write what they have learned. If they are deep into learning about Palestine-Israel, they may write a list of what they have learned from the unit. If the lessons are in their infancy, they may choose to write about what they have learned about another subject — baseball, their family, school, etc. After they have written, and depending on the topic, students may pair-share or do a quick read-around to collect group knowledge of their learning.

Read the poem aloud. Discuss the poem with students. Allow them time to sit with the poem by answering these questions: In this poem, Em Berry uses the word "gauze" to make a statement about the attacks on Gaza. Berry begins the poem "This morning I learned . . ." Who is the "our" and "us" in the poem? Who is "they/their"? What does the poet learn? How does she employ the word "gauze" to describe the war in Gaza? Quick-write a response to the poem and then discuss.

After students have read and discussed the poem, they may return to the opening line or choose another line like "because of us" or "I wondered" and write a poem using what they have learned about the history of Palestine and Israel, Gaza, etc.

ILLUSTRATION: IRINA NAJI

Linda Christensen is a Rethinking Schools editor and author of Reading, Writing, and Rising Up *and* Teaching for Joy and Justice: Re-Imagining the Language Arts Classroom. *She co-edited* Rhythm and Resistance: Teaching Poetry for Social Justice. *For many years Christensen directed the Oregon Writing Project at Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Oregon.*

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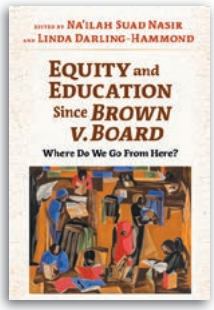

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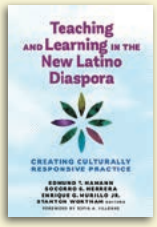

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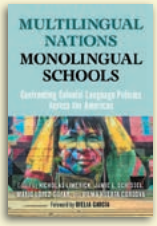

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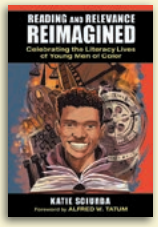

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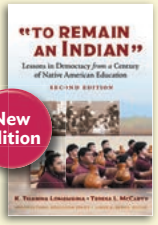

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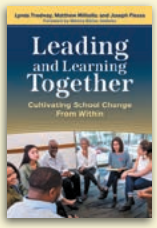

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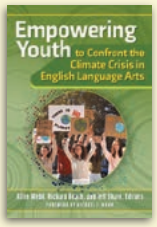

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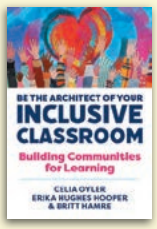

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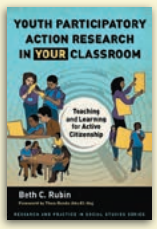

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Israeli Apartheid: A Simulation

Orange Bags, Green Bags, Red Bags, Blue Bags

By Suzanna Kassouf

Like many people I know, I have struggled to navigate the landscape of my grief since Oct. 7, 2023.

As I read the news reports of the Hamas attack that killed more than 1,200 Israelis and took 240 hostages, I felt my heart shatter as I imagined the pain and suffering of their loved ones. I was also filled with fear as to what this would mean for the people of Gaza — having witnessed four previous wars and bombardments of the tiny enclave. But my fear paled in comparison to the gruesome reality of Israel's response. Almost a year later, I have been irrevocably changed by the suffering I have witnessed on my screens.

This suffering was not hidden behind the veil of corporate news media. Students saw it every day. Though their individual algorithms on social media determined the degrees and perspectives of their exposure to this violence, almost all students shared one thing in common: They were curious. What is happening? Why? How can this be allowed to happen? What can be done?

As a social studies teacher, it is my responsibility to help students make sense of the world around them — to put this suffering in context. Mainstream news gives us the false impression that the violence in Palestine-Israel began with the Hamas attacks on Oct. 7, but those of us who study history have a different story to tell.

Setup

I teach Inquiry, a 9th-grade introduction to social studies class at Grant High School, a largely affluent, majority-white public school in Portland, Oregon. In 2024, I taught a long unit on Palestine-Israel. The lesson described here attempts to introduce students to the complex systems of fragmentation and dispossession established by the Israeli government to maintain domination and control, and how this system affects the individuals and groups living in the region. It is based on the 2022 Amnesty International report *Israel's Apartheid Against Palestinians*. Like all simulations, it is limited in scope, highlighting some aspects of reality and minimizing others, but is meant to help students gain an overview of the Israeli system of apartheid. We follow up with readings, films, and other activities to flesh out students' experiences in the simulation.

The Simulation

After studying some historical background of Palestine-Israel, students walked into our classroom to the desks pushed to the edges of the room, piled on top of each other, the chairs stacked alongside them.

"Whoa, Ms. Kassouf, what's going on?" Xander asked, as he walked into the room carrying his heavy backpack and Chromebook.

"Hey, Xander! We're doing a simulation today. Find a corner to put your stuff."

More students trickled into the room, looking surprised, apprehensive, excited.

I know that role plays and simulations can be controversial teaching strategies — see the Zinn Education Project's helpful "How to — and How Not to — Teach Role Plays" — but I designed this simulation because I wanted my students to experience firsthand some of the convoluted and unfair dynamics of the system of Israeli apartheid. Just a few months earlier we had wrapped up our Power, Identity, and Culture unit with Bill Bigelow and Norm Diamond's Organic Goodie Simulation, and I thought students would appreciate another everyone-active learning experience.

Once all the students arrived, I projected the ground rules on the whiteboard:

1. Everyone will start by getting a bag, this is your bag for the entire activity — it cannot be switched or changed.
2. Throughout the activity, you will have different opportunities to acquire candy for your bag.
3. IMPORTANT: YOU MAY NOT EAT YOUR CANDY UNTIL THE END OF THE ACTIVITY!
4. I reserve the right to confiscate candy acquired throughout the activity.

I began distributing orange, green, blue, and red bags to students. Unbeknownst to students, each bag color represented a different group with a different ID card under the Israeli apartheid system.

(It's important to be aware of the racial and social-emotional dynamics in class when assigning bags. Because some students with blue bags will have few rights, and students with orange bags will have some power over those with red bags later in the simulation, you'll want to give some thought to which students to assign to which role.)

Orange bags represented Jewish Israelis, who have only one ID card, which endows them with a host of rights and privileges. Palestinians, on the other hand, have four different ID cards, depending on their status, each carrying different rights and restrictions: Palestinians in Gaza (blue bags), Palestinians in the West Bank (red bags), Palestinian citizens of Israel (green bags), and Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem. For simplicity's sake in this first iteration of the simulation, I left out Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem, though next time I conduct this activity, I plan to include them.

For a class of 30, here is the breakdown:

14 orange (for 7 million Jewish Israelis)
5 green (for 2.5 million Palestinian Israelis)
6 red (for 3 million Palestinians in the West Bank)
4 blue (for 2 million Gazans)

Students do not learn what the bag colors represent until the end of the simulation.

Segregation

Once students had their colored candy bags, I told students that the zone where they "lived" in the classroom depended on bag color. I shouted "OK, everyone! Please get into your zones based on your bag color!"

The first lesson students needed to understand was that Palestinians are physically segregated from one another under the Israeli apartheid system — forced to live in certain places according to their ID cards, regardless of history or family ties.

Before students arrived for the day, I had used blue painter's tape to draw several borders on the classroom floor. Along the left-hand side of the room, I taped a rectangular border encompassing about 18 to 20 percent of the floor space, meant to represent the West Bank. Near the back of the classroom, I taped a much smaller square encompassing about 5 percent of the floor space (just enough space for four students to fit, albeit uncomfortably), representing the tiny area of Gaza. The Palestinian regions of the West Bank and Gaza compose only 22 percent of pre-1948 Palestine, with Israel composing the remaining 78 percent.

I pulled a red marker out of my pocket and scribbled "RED ZONE" within the rectangular border along the left-hand side of the classroom.

"If you have a red bag, please move into the Red Zone!"

Neva, Ryder, Samantha, Josephina, Pierce, and Brennen stepped inside the border, leaning on desks and sitting on the floor.

"If you have a blue bag, please move to the Blue Zone!" I called out, as I scribbled "BLUE ZONE" within the tiny square border taped on the classroom floor. Reese, Madeline, Tristan, and Connor squeezed into the zone, awkwardly adjusting their bodies to fit comfortably.

"Orange and Green, you can't go into the Blue Zone, but you can go anywhere in the Red Zone and anywhere else you'd like in the classroom," I called out, as I walked around the roughly 78 percent of the remaining space.

Both Jewish and Palestinian Israelis can visit the West Bank and enjoy much greater freedom of movement than Palestinians living in Gaza or the West Bank.

Military Service

"Alright, habibis [my dears]! It's time to get some candy! I have four Starburst for anyone willing to do military service."

About 90 percent of the hands in the classroom shot up, waving at me with that desperate "pick me" attitude that only candy can bring out in 9th graders.

"Thank you all so much for wanting to serve your country!" Grabbing my slideshow clicker, I motioned to the projection on the whiteboard. "Let's see who can do military service . . ."

One at a time, I revealed new rules.

Blue: Barred from military service by law

The students with blue bags dropped their hands in disappointment.

Red: Barred by law

Pierce called out, "Oh, come on!" as he flopped his hand down.

Green: Barred by conscience

Orange: Mandatory

As they are not citizens of Israel, Palestinians in Occupied Territories of Gaza and the West Bank cannot serve in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). For Palestinian Israelis, it's more complicated. They are considered citizens, but not nationals, and, as such, enjoy different and inferior rights in law and practice. Jewish Israelis face mandatory military service once they turn 18, but Palestinian Israelis are exempt from this requirement. Though they can technically become IDF soldiers, many Palestinian Israelis refuse to participate in the military occupation

of their fellow Palestinians. This refusal blocks them from the many benefits and privileges tied to military service in Israel. For students in my class, they missed out on candy for not participating in the military. For Palestinian citizens of Israel, they lose substantial economic compensation, housing subsidies, educational grants, job opportunities, and other benefits afforded to Jewish Israelis. This is one example of the institutional discrimination that Palestinian Israelis face. Students do not learn details like this during the simulation, but their experiences with this blue-red-green-orange inequality lays the foundation for later learning through readings, films, and other activities.

Housing and Permits

"Time to earn more candy!" I called out, holding the bag of Starburst in the air. "You all need shelter, so I'll give some candy to whoever can build a nice house. You can use anything that you find in the classroom to build or draw your home. Of course, we have a few more restrictions . . ." I motioned again to the projection on the whiteboard:

Blue: You can build only in the Blue Zone

Red: You can build only in the Red Zone

Green: You can build only in the Green Zone

Again, I grabbed a green dry erase marker from my desk and walked over to two small boxes I had taped on the classroom floor and scribbled "GREEN ZONE" in their borders.

Though Palestinian citizens of Israel have freedom of movement throughout the country, about 90 percent of them live in 139 densely populated towns and villages as a result of Israeli government policies to deliberately segregate Palestinian citizens of Israel into enclaves.

Orange: You can build anywhere except the Blue Zone

The classroom was electric as students ran around collecting supplies to build and draw their houses. Leo grabbed the Jenga blocks from our game counter and began stacking them into the shape of a small house, Felix and Tom piled together Uno decks, and several students grabbed paper and markers, scribbling drawings of houses.

Though kids in the Red Zone couldn't access the full range of classroom supplies, they got creative, restacking desks and chairs to create their houses. Wanting them to feel involved in this portion of the simulation, I dropped a few pipe cleaners and paper clips into the Blue Zone.

"Ms. Kassouf! I'm done!" Dashiel called out, waving his drawing of a house in the air.

"Nice! Here's two Starburst for your beautiful home!" I said and dropped them into his bag.

I walked around the room, dropping candy into bags for completed homes.

"Can we build a second home?" Sofia asked.

To help students grasp the wealth and income imbalance among Palestinians and Jewish Israelis, I replied "What color bag are you?"

"Orange!"

"Yeah, sure! You're an *Orange* Bagger!"

Sofia and Claire quickly turned my rolling desk chair into a "mobile home" and I plopped a few more Starburst into their candy bags.

To maximize their control of land, the Israeli government gives subsidies to Jewish settlers who buy homes in the West Bank. To illustrate this for students, I called out, "I have four pieces of candy for an Orange Bagger who is willing to build their home in the Red Zone!" The classroom fluttered with waving hands.

In a class of about 30, only one student would represent the roughly 500,000 Jewish Israeli settlers in the West Bank, while about six kids in the simulation would represent the 3 million Palestinians living in the West Bank. The Israeli military guards West Bank settlements, which are often behind walls and fortresses, and take up about 60 percent of the land space of the West Bank — land that the international community regards as belonging to Palestinians.

"Cass, bring your house on over," I said as I directed him to place the drawing of the house he had made in the middle of the Red Zone. "Cass, I know what you're thinking. It's not safe to build your home around all of these Red Baggers. But don't worry," I reached for two free-standing whiteboards and rolled them into the Red Zone, placing them on either side of Cass' home, taking up a little more than half of the taped-off area: "We've got these walls here to protect you. We're going to keep you safe!" I divided the red bag students to each side of the wall, squished now into less than a quarter of their original space.

Once all students had the opportunity to build their home and receive their candy, I yelled, "Oh my gosh! I completely forgot that you need a *permit* to build a house! How silly of me! I'm going to be coming around now and checking your permits."

As students would learn after the simulation, to interrupt the development of Palestinian communities, Israel has made it almost impossible for Palestinians to acquire building permits for their homes. In 2021, more than 150,000 Palestinians lived under the constant threat of forced eviction and demolition, many of them for the second or third time. In 2020, Israel demolished an average of 18 Palestinian structures every week in the West Bank. The same year, Israel issued 1,094 building permits for Jewish Israelis and only one for a Palestinian.

I grabbed a clipboard and began checking in with students.

"Ah, Felix, beautiful home. Can I see your bag please?" Felix held out his orange bag. "Nice orange bag, Felix!" I pointed to his bag and then down at my clipboard, "I see your permit here. Great!" I made a mark on my clipboard and moved on to approving the homes of

students with orange bags.

I peeked into the Blue Zone and said, "Actually, I don't go into this zone, so for the time being you guys can do your thing here."

Students with red bags representing Palestinians in the West Bank weren't so lucky. Though a few got creative, scribbling paper permits for themselves, as I walked into the Red Zone to "check their permits," I called out "Oh, my god! You have a *red* bag and built this house without a permit! How dare you?!" I theatrically began tearing down their structures, ripping up drawings of houses, and taking back the candy they had earned from building their house.

One of the most visible forms of Israeli apartheid is the checkpoints. Palestinians must wait for hours, often separating their homes, workplaces, and the homes of families and friends.

Checkpoints

One of the most visible forms of Israeli apartheid is the "security wall" and checkpoints. Though cars with Israeli license plates are often waved right through, Palestinians must wait for hours at these checkpoints, often separating their homes, workplaces, and the homes of families and friends.

To help students experience a fraction of this frustration, I set up a new candy opportunity: Attend your cousin's wedding. This wedding was going to take place in one of the red bag divided sections of the Red Zone — symbolizing Palestinian territory in the West Bank. Students from the other red bag section of the Red Zone, now divided by a "security wall" to protect Cass' house, would need to go through two checkpoints to get to this section of the Red Zone. Students in the Orange/Green Zone would need to get through one. Students with blue bags, representing Gazans, would not be able to attend as they could not leave the Blue Zone.

Before I announced the challenge to students, I told the Orange Baggers in the Red Zone that they should allow people with orange bags to pass through, but that they needed to question those with green and red bags to make sure they actually belonged in this area. I told them to aim for five to 10 questions before they allowed these colors through. Once I announced the challenge, I clicked play on a large three-minute timer on the projector and announced, "Make sure you are back in your own zone by nighttime — when this timer goes off."

Students lined up at the checkpoints, eager to earn some more candy for their bags.

Andrei, an Orange Bagger, peppered Sam, a Green Bagger, with questions: "Why are you traveling today? Oh, your cousin is getting married? What's his mother's name? How long has he been engaged? What's his wife's name? I thought you said he was getting married, now you're saying he already has a wife?" All the while, Andrei was sending students with orange bags through without questioning them.

By now, students were grasping the fundamental — and complicated — inequality of this system. Life was easier if you had an orange bag. Students in the Blue Zone especially were feeling the raw deal they'd received, unable to step outside of the tiny border taped on the classroom floor. Connor, fed up with his fate as a Blue Bagger, reached out to swipe an orange candy bag from a nearby student.

I confiscated the orange bag candy from the Blue Bagger, along with his candy, reminding him of the activity's Rule #4 — my right to confiscate candy acquired during the simulation.

Of course, in real life, consequences can be dire. As students learn, following the activity, between September 2000 and February 2017, Israeli forces killed 4,868 Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories *outside* of armed conflict, including 1,793 children. Amnesty International is not aware of *any case* in which an Israeli soldier has been convicted of willfully causing the death of a Palestinian in the Occupied Territories since 1987. In addition, Palestinians are tried in military courts, which have an astronomical 99 percent conviction rate, while Israeli citizens are tried in civil

Throughout our unit, we returned, again and again, to a quote by Jewish scholar Michael Brooks: "Be ruthless with systems, be kind to people."

courts.

The Election

Though there are varying levels of autonomy throughout Gaza and the West Bank, in reality, Israel — with its IDF soldiers, tanks, bombs, and guns — controls the entire region. The vast majority of Palestinians under this rule have no say in this authority that rules their daily lives. To demonstrate this, I told students we would have an election and asked who would like to run for office to change how things worked.

I was surprised that in every class I had multiple volunteers from every bag color, including some students who had never volunteered to speak in class before. I am always delighted by the ways simulations and role plays can engage students who often don't feel served by more conventional teaching strategies.

This time, instead of revealing just the rules on who could run and vote in elections, I asked students one at a time:

"Do you think Blue Baggers can run or vote in elections?"

The class responded in unison, "No!"

"Yes, you're right." I clicked the next slide on the projector: *Blue Baggers: Can't vote, can't run for office*. "What about Red Baggers?" I asked.

Again, "No!"

Red Baggers: Can't vote, can't run for office.

"Green Baggers, what do you think? Can they vote? Can they run for office?"

Again, they called out, "No!"

"Ah! They *can*!" *Green Baggers: Can vote, can run for office.*

"What do you think about Orange Baggers?"

"Yes!" they called out, with a mix of exuberance and annoyance.

"Yes, of course." *Orange Baggers: Can vote, can run for office.*

Several students with green and orange bags lined up to give their impromptu election speeches. Importantly, all those with orange bags offered more rights and privileges only to other Orange Baggers in their speeches, the Green Baggers offering similar rights to both Orange and Green Baggers. All but one, that is. Andrei offered more rights to Blue and Red Baggers as well. He didn't earn a single vote.

Throughout our unit, we frequently returned to this election. Yes, this simulation was meant to reveal to students the complex system of apartheid in Palestine-Israel, but it also served to help students understand how we, as individuals, are shaped by the systems we live under. Throughout our unit, we returned, again and again, to a quote by Jewish scholar Michael Brooks: "Be ruthless with systems, be kind to people." In his simulation reflection, Asher wrote, "I think I'm finally beginning to understand this quote."

I have talked with many teachers who are afraid to teach the truth about Palestine-Israel, fearing that criticism of Israel is inherently antisemitic. It's no surprise that so many of us harbor this fear, as Israel — and supporters of Israel, like the Anti-Defamation League — routinely weaponize accusations of antisemitism to shut down criticism or solidarity with the movement for Palestinian liberation and human rights. Though we cannot bow to this dishonesty, it is our responsibility as educators to ensure that we help students separate the Israeli *government* from being representative of all Jewish *people*. The unjust actions of the Israeli government have nothing to do with their Jewishishness, and everything to do with the corrupting influence of power.

Reflection

With about 20 minutes left in our 90-minute class period, I called the simulation to a close and asked students to grab their notebooks and find a quiet place to reflect, projecting the following prompts on the whiteboard:

Please take a moment to reflect

on the simulation we just did. Share your thoughts and feelings throughout the game. How do you think the students with the other bag colors felt? Be specific. If you'd like, you can make some predictions about what you think the different colors represent.

Once students had time to write and talk in pairs, I asked for a few volunteers to share out.

Lois said, "I had an orange bag and I felt great, because I had all the power. I could basically do anything I wanted — including bullying the blues and reds. I imagine it was pretty boring being one of those colors though, especially blue since they couldn't go anywhere for the whole game."

We would talk more about this later, but for now, I said, "Yeah, when we're the ones in power, it can feel good, and it can feel hard to want to give that up. Especially when we're not seeing firsthand the real suffering of the other groups, or when we've been brought up to believe they are somehow not as valuable as we are, or are our enemies in some way."

No doubt, labeling the experience of Blue Baggers — Gazans — in the simulation as "boring" transforms misery into boredom. But a simulation is not "real life"; it is a simulation. I called on a few Blue and Red Baggers who confirmed feelings of boredom and frustration during the activity. In my classes, there was not much resistance from students with blue or red bags, but if students did resist, I would welcome that. While the main point of the simulation is to help students understand the complex web of laws and policies that make up Israeli apartheid, any instances of defiance can help prompt discussion about the rich and varied traditions of Palestinian resistance.

As we were in the middle of our Palestine-Israel unit, most students guessed that orange represented something to do with Israel and that red and blue represented Palestinians. Green was more of a mystery, as I think most people don't understand that about 20 percent of the Israeli population are Palestinian Israelis (Palestinians who did not flee in 1948 — when Israel became a state — and are sometimes called '48 Palestinians). In fact, Israel often points to these Palestinians, and the superior rights they possess compared to their counterparts in Gaza and the West Bank, to defend themselves against the accusations of apartheid. But, as the simulation shows, the complex laws and policies that form this system inherently rely on this fragmentation of the Palestinian population.

The following class, we confirmed the colors of the bags as students watched *Israel's Apartheid Against Palestinians: Cruel System of Domination and Crime Against Humanity*, the Amnesty International video based on their report. In their reflections, students were able to connect their own experiences during the simulation to what they learned from the video. And students later learned more about the twisted Israeli legal architecture in "The Laws of Israel" (see *Teaching Palestine: Lessons, Stories, Voices*, p. 130).

Amelia, having grasped an essential lesson from the activity, wrote in her notebook: "This class taught me how it is very important to separate the people from the systems. I was a Jewish Israeli in the simulation. I do not believe that what was happening in the simulation was just, but I found myself being influenced. I wanted to keep my power because it was good for me."

Gabe, a Jewish student who had been defensive of Israel throughout the unit, wrote in his reflection: "I learned about the way Israel's laws benefit Jewish Israelis. This connects to my experience during the simulation because I was blue (Gazan) and it was incredibly frustrating. I wasn't able to move out of my little zone. I see how this can relate to Palestinians living in these kinds of conditions. I feel very sad for those families who are split apart because they don't have the same IDs. I think Israel should be a safe place for Jews to go, but that doesn't mean they should get more rights."

I was moved reading Gabe's reflection. I went into this unit knowing that I was gearing up to teach about arguably the most controversial topic of our time, especially for my community. I have many Jewish students with varying perspectives and degrees of knowledge about and connection to the region. During this school year, I had no Arab or Palestinian students, though I myself am Arab American. I felt a strong responsibility to teach this unit from a humanitarian perspective. Gabe's reflection captures this for me. I think that when most young people understand the reality of what is happening in Palestine-Israel, they want a just solution for all people involved. We can't turn back the clock, so the question now is what will we do? How can we teach in a way that builds empathy and compassion for all people, while fiercely opposing unjust and oppressive systems? How can we honor the inherent worth and dignity of every human being? Though a path to peace will be complex, one thing is certain: We can only get there by teaching the truth. ●

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“Superachievers” vs. “Super Predators”

How the Racist Love of the Model Minority Is Weaponized Against Black and Asian American Students

By Wayne Au

ILLUSTRATION: HOWARD BARRY

Freedom

"Where one is enslaved, all are in chains!"

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War and Jim Crow Set Back at Bandung

In 1987, *Time* magazine published an article titled "The New Whiz Kids," which labeled Asian American students as "superachievers."

In 1996, then-First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton infamously referred to Black teenagers as "super predators" who lacked empathy and conscience.

Made nearly a decade apart, these two statements highlight how the racialization of Black and Asian American students have been tightly linked historically through the Model Minority stereotype — a stereotype rooted in white supremacy and anti-Blackness that has hurt both Black and Asian American students.

There was nothing new about *Time*'s article: It was merely a recycling of the well-worn stereotype of the Asian American Model Minority, which originated in January of 1966, when the *New York Times* published "Success Story, Japanese-American Style," by William Pettersen.

Centering around the idea that Japanese Americans have overcome racism better than other groups, Pettersen crowed, "By any criterion of good citizenship that we choose, the Japanese Americans are better than any other group in our society, including native-born whites." He went on to claim that, like European immigrants, Japanese Americans have also taken "advantage of the public schools, the free labor market, and America's political democracy" and "climbed out of the slums, took better-paying occupations, and acquired social respect and dignity." By comparison, Pettersen contended, this has not been true for groups he labeled as "problem minorities," specifically "negroes, Indians, and Mexicans."

According to Pettersen, education was "key" to Japanese American success. After interviewing Japanese American college students at UC Berkeley, he found them to be clean, neat, studious, and, importantly, law-abiding and respectful — unlike the "bohemian slob" students he saw protesting on campus at the time. Pettersen also argued that Japanese culture pushes Japanese Americans to work hard and have an "achievement orientation," something that he asserted is lacking in "lower-class Americans, whether negro or white."

In December of that same year, *U.S. News & World Report* published its own Model Minority article titled "Success Story of One Minority Group in U.S." This piece focused on Chinese Americans, calling them "a model of self-respect and achievement in today's America."

The article repeatedly asserted that Chinese Americans are self-sufficient and used this to continually assert the racist idea that Black people were too dependent on state support and were draining resources. At one point the article fallaciously argues that "At a time it is being proposed that hundreds of billions be spent to uplift Negroes and other minorities, the nation's 300,000 Chinese Americans are moving ahead on their own — with no help from anyone else." The article then went on to say that Chinese Americans have been successful because they are willing to work at any job, "don't sit around moaning" about their situation, are good citizens with strong families, and are obedient and hardworking in their jobs and at school — all the while implicitly suggesting Black people were the opposite.

The article ends by quoting a social worker who asserts that "it must be recognized that the Chinese and other Orientals in California were faced with even more prejudice than faces the Negro today. . . . The Orientals came back, and today they have established themselves as

strong contributors to the health of the whole community."

These articles established the architecture of the Model Minority stereotype: Despite having experienced significant racism historically, due to hard work, cultural values, obedience, respecting authority, family structure, achievement orientation, valuing education, and self-reliance, Asian Americans have still been successful.

Further, by both tacit and explicit implication, so-called "problem minorities" — especially Black Americans — just need to stop complaining, take note of Asian American success, and simply realize that racism is not really a problem. Thus, the Model Minority stereotype was born in 1966 of racism, white supremacy, and anti-Blackness.

Of course, the appearance of the Model Minority stereotype at this time was not coincidental. The Watts Rebellion had occurred in 1965, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 had passed as well. The *Moynihan Report* — which advanced racist arguments that Black families were weak and that a culture of poverty was the reason for their social and economic status — was published in the same year.

In this context, the stereotype of the respectful, clean, and non-rebellious Asian American Model Minority also served as a racial counterpoint to the increasingly organized and militant Black and Brown Liberation movements of the time. Consequently, the Model Minority stereotype also serves as an argument about respectability politics and the "right" way to achieve racial justice through quiet hard work, rather than loud, disruptive, or "scary" protests.

From *Fortune* magazine declaring Asian Americans to be "America's Super Minority" in the 1980s, to the racist, eugenicist *Bell Curve* arguing that Asians had the highest IQs of all races in the 1990s, to the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, Bloomberg, the *Economist*, and CNBC all publishing articles promoting the Asian American Model Minority in 2015, media, politicians, and pundits have ensured the stereotype's durability for nearly 60 years.

Educational achievement has also been central to the Model Minority narrative, where across the decades Asian American students have been called "academic marvels" by *U.S. News and World Report*, the "reigning academic stars of academia" with "dazzling academic success," and "stellar" by the *New York Times*. As author Stacey J. Lee notes in her book *Unraveling the "Model Minority" Stereotype*, these portrayals of Asian American student success are consistently attributed to high expectations of parents, two-parent homes, Confucian values, being studious, being quiet, being obedient, working hard, and valuing education.

Like the more general stereotype, the Asian American Model Minority student also gets used against Black students. Rather than looking at racism and economic stratification as sources of educational disparities, the stereotype instead reinforces racist tropes of Black students being unintelligent, lazy, "bad," and uncaring educational failures who lack discipline and drive, and who have low educational expectations compared to their Model Minority peers.

The Racist Love of the Model Minority

Ultimately, despite its portrayal as a "positive" stereotype, the Model Minority is based on a racist, white supremacist love — a kind of love that both upholds Asian Americans to be used against other racial groups while also subjecting them to ongoing anti-Asian hatred and violence. Reflecting on the rise in attacks on Asian Americans in the early 2020s, in her book *Racist Love*, Leslie Bow discusses how this love

> transforms into racist hate with dizzying speed. . . . [R]acial feeling easily flip-flops its mode of existence. . . . For Asian Americans, hard-won taboos against hate speech evaporated overnight. . . . The contemporary moment of undisguised anti-Asian bias pulls me full circle: from philic to phobic, from compliment to slur. . . . [I]n the shift to racial hatred, what remains operative is racial feeling on a continuum, adoration and animosity as flip sides of the same coin.

To Bow's point, over the last six decades, the "positivity" of Model Minority stereotype has never protected Asian Americans from the violence of white supremacy. From the early 1980s murder of Vincent Chin in Detroit by two recently laid off white male auto workers, to a

The Model Minority is based on a racist love — a kind of love that both upholds Asian Americans to be used against other racial groups while also subjecting them to ongoing anti-Asian hatred.

white gunman killing five and wounding 32 Asian American schoolchildren in the late 1980s, to the white supremacist "dot busters" in New Jersey who violently targeted South Asian Americans in the 1990s, to the 2012 killing of six South Asian Americans at a Sikh temple in Wisconsin, to the thousands of reported incidents of anti-Asian hate that took place from March 2020 to March 2021 amidst the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, to the 2021 shooting of six Asian American women by a white male gunman in Georgia — the stereotype of the good, hardworking, and law-abiding Model Minority has never stopped Asian Americans from being seen as a threat to American whiteness. Indeed, one could easily argue that the racial exceptionalism underlying the stereotype of Model Minority success has likely only increased anti-Asian violence.

The Asian American Model Minority student has similarly been viewed as a threat to the education of white students. During the 1980s, newspaper articles regularly described Asian American students as "surging" like a "tidal wave" into elite universities, and graffiti saying "Stop the Asian Hordes" appeared at UC Berkeley. White university students also joked that UCLA (the University of California Los Angeles) stood for "University of Caucasians Living Among Asians," that MIT (the Massachusetts Institute of Technology) was really an acronym for "Made in Taiwan," and that UCI (the University of California Irvine) really meant "University of Chinese Immigrants."

In March of 2011 a white UCLA student went viral on social media after posting a video titled "Asians in the Library," where she complained about "hordes of Asian people" and racistly mimicked Asian languages. All of which supports Nolan Cabrera's 2014 research, which found that even though Asian Americans are the only racial group in the United States to attend universities proportionate to the overall population, white college students still view Asian American students with resentment and feel they are over-represented in higher education. What some might find surprising is that, because of the stereotype, many Asian Americans have also come to resent themselves.

Internalizing Racist Love

The reality is that many Asian Americans have internalized the Model Minority stereotype as a kind of racial identity. As Erin Ninh, author of *Passing for Perfect*, explains:

> . . . [T]he model minority is coded into one's programming — racialization becoming feeling and belief — its litmus test is whether an Asian American *feels pride or shame* by those standards. If you have enjoyed what Tiger parenting memes say about you (laughed ruefully, maybe, but knowingly): Congratulations, you

have tested positive. With your click, like, and share, you affirm an identity set apart from other racial groups: a feeling that *our bar is higher.*

The internalization of the Model Minority stereotype means that if we are not successful, society does not see us as "real" Asian Americans, nor do we see ourselves as "real" either. This reality moves Ninh to ask a particularly painful question: " [I]f Asian Americans are recognized as persons *by their communities and their country* only by the success frame, then whose public identity is a failure allowed to use? Whose racial reputation and likeness if not their own?"

Consequently, there is a lot of evidence that the Model Minority stereotype contributes to the poor mental health of Asian Americans, especially students. For instance, one study of Asian Americans aged 18–30 found that pressures associated with the Model Minority and racial discrimination in school resulted in increased stress, what some have specifically referred to as "model minority stress."

In addition, the Model Minority stereotype is predicated on a kind of Asian American, able-bodied perfection, such that we do not risk asking for help — since needing help means we are imperfect and potentially misaligned with social, community, and even our own expectations of ourselves as Asian Americans. As such, research also finds Asian Americans resist reporting bullying and harassment and are also unlikely to seek mental health supports and that many doctors incorrectly presume that Asian Americans face fewer mental health issues than other racial groups. Many Asian Americans have their psychological conditions underdiagnosed and misdiagnosed because of this.

Hence, as one Asian American psychologist explains in an article for Axios, "We self-harm. We quietly continue to do our homework, even though we're super depressed or anxious. We act out inside the house, but it never shows outside the house. . . . So this system of schools has . . . always been like, 'Oh, you're good, you're fine.'"

These issues all contribute to the fact that suicide is the second leading cause of death for Asian Americans ages 15–34, with the highest concentration between ages 20–24. For Asian Americans, the Model Minority stereotype is literally killing us.

But what if that magical sauce for Model Minority success is not magical at all, but simply confirms what we already know about income and education disparities?

Clearly, the Asian American Model Minority stereotype comes at a cost: It supports anti-Black racism and deficit views of Black people, subjects Asian Americans to white supremacist fears and violence, and it damages the Asian American psyche. But what if all that stereotypic Asian American achievement — that magical sauce for Model Minority success — is not magical at all, but instead simply confirms what we already know about income and education disparities in the United States?

Confirming the Obvious

If you took most educational data on face value, you might conclude that Asian Americans really are a Model Minority. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2022 Asian American students were tops among all racial groups in total NAEP and SAT scores, and data from 2021 shows a four-year college enrollment rate for Asian Americans of nearly 76 percent, compared to a rate between 40 and 43 percent for Black and Latine students. In addition, census data from 2022 shows that 61 percent of Asian Americans have college degrees, a rate that significantly outpaces Latine peoples (20.8 percent), Black Americans (28.1 percent), and whites (41.9 percent).

However, what is lost in this data is that Asian American achievement simply proves what has been obvious across decades of educational research: Parental education and economic class have almost an ironclad correlation with academic achievement.

After decades of Asian immigration to the United States being illegal, the federal government passed the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, giving preference to Asian immigrants who already held higher education degrees and who had professional skills. These had a profound effect on the educational outcomes of Asian Americans. For instance, between 1966 and 1977, more than 80 percent of the immigrants from India were professional and technical workers, including 40,000 engineers, 25,000 doctors, and 20,000 scientists with PhDs. As another example, between 1966 and 1985, 25,000 well-educated nurses immigrated to the United States from the Philippines. Importantly, the Pew Research Center estimates that more than 98 percent of Asian Americans either immigrated after 1965 or are descendants of post-1965 immigrants.

Currently, U.S. immigration policy gives preference to immediate family of permanent U.S. residents and gives

second preference to educated professionals. Wealthy immigrants can also gain entrance to the United States by investing in U.S. businesses in the amounts of either $900,000 or $1.8 million. Again, these rules influence the Asian American population. Data from 2017 to 2019 shows that more than 60 percent (more than 490,000) of the immigrants to the United States were from Asia, mostly on the H-1B visa used heavily by the technology, banking, and entertainment sectors.

There is also a selection process in many Asian home countries that limits who immigrates to the United States. As Prachi Gupta explains in *They Called Us Exceptional*, in India, "middle- and upper-class Indians from dominant castes typically access the best schools and jobs that feed into opportunities in America, which favor immigrants who bring specialized skills in tech and science." The result is a highly selective Indian American community where 68 percent of Indian immigrants to the United States already have a college degree. This rate is 3.5 times that of the general U.S. population, and, more importantly, it is *nine times that of the general population in India itself.*

Research consistently shows that achievement markers like college attainment and SAT scores correlate very strongly with family income and education levels of parents. Given that so much of the Asian American population is sharply skewed toward a select group of immigrants, the majority of whom likely came to the United States with college degrees and professional jobs already in hand, it is no wonder large numbers of Asian American students are getting high test scores and attending college.

Southeast Asian Americans also confirm the tight relationship between levels of family income and education with academic achievement. Since 1975, refugees from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, including the Khmer and Hmong/Hmoob peoples, have been resettled in the United States after fleeing persecution due to U.S. imperialist military incursions in their home countries. While initial decades of resettlement resulted in more than 1.1 million refugees being relocated to the United States, more recent Southeast Asian immigrants have arrived through visas for family members or employment such that there are more than 2.5 million Southeast Asian Americans in the United States.

Contrary to the Asian American Model Minority stereotype, nearly 44 percent of Southeast Asian Americans are officially low-income, with 460,000 of those officially living in poverty. Notably, Hmong/Hmoob Americans experience a 58 percent low-income rate, with 26 percent officially living in poverty — rates nearly double that of white Americans and on par with Black Americans. College attainment rates for Southeast Asian Americans are also significantly lower than other Asian American groups: For Vietnamese Americans it is 29 percent, Burmese Americans 21 percent, Hmong and Laotian Americans 18 percent, and Cambodian Americans it is 16 percent. Data from California (where the highest concentrations of Southeast Asian Americans live) also indicates that almost 30 percent of Southeast Asian Americans there have not earned a high school diploma.

Whether at the top or the bottom of income and education levels in the country, Asian American academic achievement simply confirms the obvious fact that our system of education reproduces social and economic inequities that privilege families with higher levels of education and financial resources.

Model Minority Divestment

In 1903, in *The Souls of Black Folk*, W. E. B. Du Bois posed this question to African Americans: "How does it feel to be a problem?" Nearly 100 years later in *The Karma of Brown Folk*, Vijay Prashad

suggests that the question for the Asian American Model Minority is instead "How does it feel to be a solution?"

And that is just it. Framed as a Model Minority, Asian Americans are presented as a solution to racism: Just keep your head down, work hard, stay quiet, be self-sufficient, respect authority. It is the mythology of Horatio Alger's rags-to-riches, pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps American meritocracy, only this time in yellowface.

When it comes to the Asian American Model Minority stereotype, we are left with a choice: Maintain this investment in the Model Minority and, by extension, maintain the investment in white supremacy, racial capitalism, settler colonialism, and anti-Blackness that comes with it, or divest from the stereotype entirely — including ditching the internalized identity for Asian Americans themselves — because it does not serve anyone's humanity.

Such divestment would require developing more critical understandings of Asian Americans by all racial groups, as well as developing critical, radical understandings of the deep connections between Asian Americans and non-Asian Americans — what Pulitzer Prize-winning author Viet Nguyen refers to as "expansive solidarity."

Part of this process could include uncovering, radically reconstructing, and relearning Asian American histories that includes progressive, radical, and even revolutionary activism that operates in direct contradiction to the Model Minority stereotype. This could include learning about historical heroes like Yuri Kochiyama and Grace Lee Boggs, both of whom were radical Asian American activists who worked closely with Black community organizers on issues of justice and solidarity. More recent examples could include activists like Connie Wun, Tamara Nopper, and Dylan Rodriguez, all of whom have been making deep and serious connections between Asian American communities and the abolitionist movement. Similarly, groups like Tsuru for Solidarity, Red Canary Song, the Asian Prisoner Support Committee, AAPI Women Lead, and Butterfly have also been working on a wide range of abolitionist projects.

We should also be supporting K–12 Asian American Studies curriculum, especially by those doing it from a more liberated Ethnic Studies approach. For instance, we can see this work being brought to schools, communities, and teachers through Sohyun An and Noreen Naseem Rodriguez's "Stop AAPI Hate Asian American Studies Curriculum Framework," which asks students to critically consider "Imperialism, War, & Migration," "Citizenship & Racialization," "Resistance & Solidarity," and "Reclamation & Joy." An and Rodriguez have continued this work with their colleague Esther Kim through their excellent book *Teaching Asian America in Elementary Classrooms*, which provides a strong conceptual framing along with concrete examples for helping students develop critical consciousness surrounding Asian American histories and communities.

These examples demonstrate the potential of Asian American activists in concert with K–12 Asian American Studies to show how Asian Americans are deeply connected to all racial groups who have struggled against settler colonialism, anti-Black racism, and white supremacy. Indeed, recognizing these connections harkens back to the very origins of the racial category of "Asian American" itself, which largely grew out of the Black and Brown power movements of the late 1960s.

Ultimately, there is nothing positive about the Model Minority stereotype. The racist love of the Asian American student superachiever simply helps justify the white supremacist framing of Black youth as super predators. In the process it flattens the humanity of Asian Americans, disregards the material role that conditions of immigration play in educational achievement, causes mental trauma among Asian Americans, and gets used to argue that racism does not exist — all the while promoting white supremacist beliefs about Black and Brown peoples. The Model Minority needs to be abandoned as a racist stereotype and replaced with an identity that is anti-racist and based on expansive solidarity with other peoples. ●

It is the mythology of Horatio Alger's rags-to-riches, pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps American meritocracy, only this time in yellowface.

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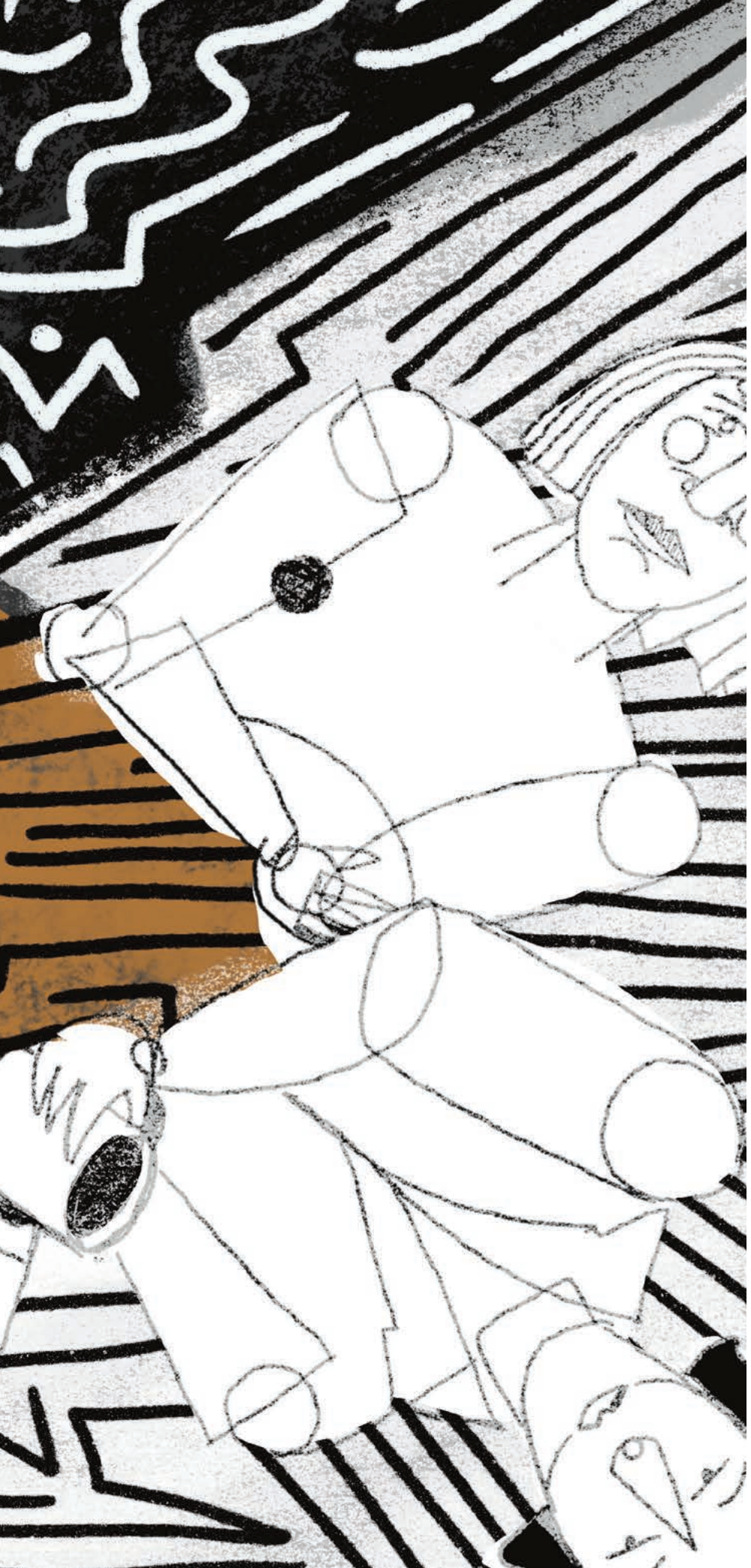
Table Talk:

An IEP Meeting — from the Other Side

ILLUSTRATION: EBIN LEE



By Anne Smith

There was a long oblong wooden table. It took up most of the space in the room. Surrounding it were chairs. Enough for everyone who had been invited or summoned to the table. At the head of the table sat a woman around my age, sipping from a cup with the district logo on it. "We're so glad that you could make it today." I stared at her and felt myself getting angry. Was she throwing shade already? Was this how this game was going to be played? I took a breath and tried to focus; maybe I was just being defensive.

It had been a long morning. I shouldn't have gone to work, but I didn't want to let anyone down. I also didn't have any leave so there really wasn't much choice. It was a teacher workday. One meeting and the rest of the time in my classroom. I had decided that I would walk out the door on time and I would be able to make it to the meeting on time. The day was already hot and the air was getting thick. The air conditioning in my room was not working. I didn't need to look in the mirror to know that I was starting to sweat my hair out. The light

cleaning that I had planned to do turned into a commercial for Clorox as I fought with the tables who refused to let go of its sweat, its fingerprints, and memories that covered it. Time got away from me, and I left later than I had intended. There was still time if I hurried.

Every car, truck, and bus seemed to be moving in slow motion. The heat stopping their desire to move any faster. I had somewhere to be, and I was now officially late.

These were words that I had heard and said hundreds maybe even thousands of times before. From the other side of the table.

I saw the building and pulled into the first parking space that I could find. Forget the hair, forget the clothes that were now wrinkled and smelled faintly of Clorox, my goal was to get to that meeting as soon as I could. I walked past the imposing gothic columns that protected the school administration building, pushed through the doors and found the elevator. In my work world, IEP meetings were held in our school buildings. In my work world, I was in control. This was not my work world. Today, I was a parent. I searched the directory for the special education office, pushed the button, and waited. "Ma'am, you need to sign in" a voice came from behind me. Walking to the security desk I scribbled my name, keeping my eyes on the elevator.

What was taking that elevator so long?

When I finally entered the room, I found the largest table that I had ever seen for a meeting like this. I looked for a place to sit. They were all taken except for the one that the table had held for me. The head of the table was occupied by the woman who had yet to greet me. She didn't wait for a reply or for me to sit down, instead she took command of the room and said, "We can now begin the meeting. We'll go around the table and introduce ourselves and our titles and department." She looked directly at me and stated her name, title, and then smiled. With her mouth. There was no smile in her eyes or in her voice. In her eyes I saw what she saw. What they all saw. A disheveled, overweight, single, late Black woman. A walking stereotype. She was bored with it. They all were. You could see it in the way that they glanced down checking their phones only to look in my direction when it was their turn to speak. They had to go through the motions, but they had made up their minds. It occurred to me that there was an invisible seating chart at this table. No place cards or name placards as they would have in an important meeting, but somehow this table had been arranged to show me that I was surrounded by the experts. That they were the ones who knew what was best. They were the epitome of the three C's. Calm. Cool. Collected. A police officer, a social worker, a psychologist, an occupational therapist, a speech therapist, and assorted other official people were all seated at the table. The person who had the final say in the matter, the head of special education for the district, sat at the head of the table.

I was struggling to appear calm and listen to what was being said. These people were all so confident and self-assured. Struggling to keep from biting my nails, I remembered that Sheryl Sandberg had said in her book that when you are in a meeting you lean in to show that you are engaged. She said that leaning in showed that you were in control. So I leaned on the table, folding and unfolding my hands, forcing myself to make eye contact with every person. Inside my head, the voices said, "You got this." The things that they were telling me were not unfamiliar. These were words that I had heard and said hundreds maybe even thousands of times before. From the other side of the table. But this time the words were coming at me. They were so fast. Like darts aimed to hit and destroy their target. Me. I wanted to say "wait." I wanted to say "stop." Instead, I said nothing.

"Do you have any questions?" a deep voice from the other side of the table asked. When I said nothing, another voice asked, "Do you understand?"

I looked down at the table and wondered how many meetings like this it had been a part of. I wondered how many tears did this table hold from parents who did not have the words to speak for their children. Had there been other people whose voices were swallowed into the silence and absorbed by the table? How many other people had grabbed its sides for support when they could not bear to hear the terms, the words, and the judgments being shot at them and landing in their soul.

In my silence, I understood many things. What I understood was this table was chosen to give the appearance of inclusivity. What I understood was that I was a piece of pepper expected to drown in a sea of salt. What I understood was that these people saw me as a statistic not a person and had no interest in seeing me differently. What I understood was that they read a file and saw a child who never knew his father, who had experienced homelessness, who had been taken away from his mother, lived with his grandparents, lost his grandmother, and was now living with relatives he did not know. All before the age of 7. What I understood was, they had already written him off. What I didn't know was how I could fix it. Before I could think of what to say, the special education head announced

her decision to not provide the services requested and leaned back. I didn't understand. I had collected the necessary documentation. Jumped through every hoop that they had set up. Medication. Counseling, individual and family. Now, I was being dismissed.

Something began to move on the inside of me. At some point, I must have leaned back in my chair because when she leaned back, I felt the table pull me to lean in. All the way in. I was once told that I was my own worst enemy getting in my way. But when the ancestors, emphasis on the Anne, began to rise up inside of me, they gave me a voice. They came up at one of two times, first when I felt that something was unfair or unjust or when you try to do something to one of my kids. When the Annecestors rise up, there is no holding me back.

Slowly, in a quiet voice I thanked them for their decision. "I realize that I only have a master's degree in education and 13 years in special education," I said with a smile on my lips, and steel in my eyes, "but it is my understanding of Public Law 94-142 that I have met my burden of proof for eligibility and you are required by law to provide the appropriate services and placement for this child." As I looked around the table at the shocked faces, I held tightly onto the table, this time to keep from laughing. "While I would not like to take this to litigation," I continued, "please understand that my husband and I will not hesitate to do so if this child's needs are not met." The school representative was looking through the file that she had closed and rested on the table. The social worker and the psychologist put their heads together and compared notes to hide their confusion, probably trying to figure out how they had missed the fact that I had a degree, and a husband. It was then that the table released me and I sat back.

Leaving the room and the table, I realized how lucky I was to have found my words. That I understood the system and the process. I also recognized that there were so many people who looked like me who did not. As educators, we say that we work to include "all stakeholders" when we discuss best practices for students. But do we really mean that? I wondered, with shame, how many times, I had made someone without the knowledge and skills that I was able to call on, feel as if they had no voice or that their voice didn't matter. Being on the other side of the table helped me to remember that as many stakeholders as may be at the table, the person with the largest stake is still simply a parent trying to do what's best for their child. ●

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“Starcups Workers Unite!” — Students Learn Their Workplace Rights

By Nicolle Fefferman

PHOTO: AUDRA ANDERSON

Nicolle Fefferman (youngworkersedproject@gmail.com) is the director of the Young Workers Education Project (theyoungworkerseducationproject.org), a Zinn Education Project 2024–2026 Prentiss Charney Fellow, and a former high school teacher. Both of Nicolle’s children are LAUSD students and she continues to support their schools as an activist with Parents Supporting Teachers.

Students put on their props — ties, union stickers, lanyards, name tags. The room was full of laughter and last-minute reminders. The town hall meeting was about to begin, and groups were settling in to discuss the unit's central question: Should the Starcups workers at Store 867 vote to be a union?

It was day three at the Los Angeles area Gardena High School in Mr. Martinez's Law and Society class. Jazmin Rivera and Emely Rauda from the UCLA Labor Center and I had worked with students to prepare them for a simulation of a National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) union election based on the Starbucks Workers United organizing over the last few years.

The power of this role play comes from the lived realities of young workers. One of the students in the room was a Starbucks employee at a very busy location close to Los Angeles International Airport. Every single student in the room had working adults at home. These students would be getting jobs sooner rather than later and the conversations we were having could not be more relevant. Students seemed eager to engage around the daily experiences of individuals and groups in our economy. We gave students the space and support to practice talking about workplace issues with co-workers, public servants, employers, and community members.

Over the last few years Starbucks workers have led an organizing movement that started in Buffalo, New York. There are now more than 500 unionized Starbucks stores across the nation. As with almost all workers attempting to unionize, Starbucks workers faced many obstacles in their fight to win their union and bargain a first contract. Workers have had their hours cut and been fired as punishment for unionizing. A June 2024 Supreme Court ruling makes it even harder for NLRB agents to help workers enforce their rights in the face of union busting tactics. Despite all this, Starbucks employees are among the more notable groups of the newest generation of workers, alongside auto workers in the South, fighting to utilize their power to improve wages, benefits, and working conditions.

Preparing for the Role Play

At Gardena High School, students were playing one of five roles: non-union workers, union workers, community members, corporate managers, or NLRB agents. Mr. Martinez chose student groups ahead of time to create balanced teams of five. Students collaborated in their groups with self-assigned responsibilities such as facilitator, recorder, manager, and timekeeper. The non-union workers were the largest group in the room, divided into opening, midday, and closing shifts.

I started by drawing on students' existing knowledge about unions, corporations, and communities through charts and readings. We began by creating class definitions for the terms union, management, and town hall. We examined the dramatic decline of union membership from 1955 to 2021 and considered the reasons behind the change. Students received background reading about the history of the National Labor Relations Act, reviewed a profile of the Starcups Corporation, and learned about Starcups Workers United. We gave students two days to develop their character within their group role through writing and conversation. Groups received texts with reading guides to help develop their characters' arguments for a presentation and dialogue.

As they read, students playing the Starcups Workers United members learned that the "power of the union is strength in numbers" when standing up to a company that had just "announced a record profit of $32.3 billion for 2022 with an 8 percent increase in profit over the last year." The group representing Starcups Corporate read that the company's "deep commitment to ethical and sustainable capitalism had made it a model in the service industry." The neighborhood customers in the community members group learned about "rumors that Starcups shut down cafes" after workers joined the union. The non-union Starcups workers group discussed how "there never seems to be enough people scheduled" to keep the workplace safe and efficient. The group of NLRB agents reviewed the agency's history, purpose, and role in identifying unfair labor practices in the organizing workplace.

Students wrote first-person narratives for the first 25 minutes of day two using the prompt "Introduce yourself. Use your real name, but the rest you can imagine from the perspective of your role. How old are you? What is your work experience and family situation? What do you enjoy about working at Starcups? What is challenging? What needs to be changed? What do you feel might be gained by becoming a union member? What might you lose? Provide ideas, feelings, and examples."

At Gardena, Iris from the closing shift Starcups group wrote:

> I am 26 years old and have two kids. We live with my parents and younger brother. I have worked at Starcups for two years but I've been at this one for a few months. I had to transfer to a different store because the other one was too far away from my house. I am very happy at this store except there are never enough people. The midday shift is usually too busy to clean and when I come in, it's a mess. The closing shift has to clean the whole store every night while still helping customers. . . . I hope that being in a union will help me get more hours and a raise. I don't know how long it will take before things will get better.

We asked students to share their narratives within their groups. We could hear laughter and appreciation from the tables as they read out loud. Writing and sharing these narratives helped build a sense of identity that could be drawn upon during the questions and comments portion of the simulation.

I talked with groups and encouraged students to dig deeper for juicy details in the reading as they wrote their character texts, presentations, and questions for the town hall meeting. Groups created an introduction to explain their connection to Starcups company and the employees on the verge of voting in the NLRB election. They prepared a statement from their character's perspective on the simulation's central question: Should the workers at this Starcups store vote to be a union? We asked groups to also build a list of three questions to ask the other participants in the town hall. Finally, students wrote a closing statement to make toward the end of the meeting.

At the start of the third day, we asked students to split their groups in half with some people staying at their table and the others traveling around the room. They were directed to discover who in the room might be their allies and who might challenge their thinking. This part of the lesson continued to build student confidence in articulating their character's perspective. Students then adjusted their presentations and questions based on what they learned in these quick conversations. This moment felt and sounded a little chaotic as students walked from table to table running into both allied and opposing viewpoints. Students seemed excited to begin the simulation.

Simulating a National Labor Relations Board Meeting

Once the teams circled up and sat down, we started the meeting. Groups sat in a large circle with identifying placards and props. During the first round, spokespeople answered the introductory questions: Who are we and why are we here? Two students from each group shared their character's backstory and connection to Starcups.

In Mr. Martinez's room, the non-union opening shift spokesperson Maritza talked about the lack of proper training and adequate staffing that led to problems for the midday shift. Ray from the Starcups Workers United members declared that Starcups was making billions and could afford to pay people more while telling the room that the corporation could no longer scare them. Tristan and Natalie from the community members group worried about both potential cost increases with unionization and worker safety without a union contract. Petero, who represented Starcups Corporate, pointed out that the company was like a family and that a union might get in the way of workplace relationships. The last group to speak were the NLRB agents; they took command of the room.

Sydney came out swinging. She called out Starcups Corporate for engaging in unfair labor practices and told the Starcups managers they could not hold captive-audience meetings to tell workers to vote no in the election. She declared that any harassment of union supporters could result in penalties. Sydney pointedly reminded the non-union workers and Starcups Corporate that the NLRB was there to protect workers' rights.

During the second round, student groups addressed the big question: Should Starcups Store 867 employees become members of Starcups Workers United? The unionized workers called on the non-union employees to join them in the struggle for fair wages, benefits, and respect.

"Don't let the union come between us," Petero from Starcups management told the non-union workers. "We have promised higher wages, and we will listen to your requests. You don't want to pay dues to a group that can't guarantee you anything."

"We want better for our families," responded Flavia from the opening and midday shifts. "Even though some of us are students without children of our own, there are many of us who are single parents. We deserve to make enough money and still have time to see our family."

"Union dues are going to be taken out of our paycheck," worried the closing shift spokesperson Raul. "When will we get a raise and better benefits?"

It was a fast-moving back-and-forth that needed some light facilitation to make space for broader participation. During the conversation, I kept an eye on the clock to guarantee that we could complete the simulation and hold a meaningful debrief.

For the third round, student groups asked each other questions and made final comments about how the non-union workers should vote.

"Do you understand what happens during a strike?" Starcups manager Adrian asked the non-union workers.

"We know what will happen if we keep on working without being a union," Flavia from the opening shift fired back at him. Natalie wondered if the company would still support building a new parking structure to accommodate the increased neighborhood traffic once the store went union. Petero told her there was no guarantee for what would happen if the workers voted yes.

"How can you tell us you will have to increase the cost of coffee if we are union when the company made a record profit last year?" asked Iris from Starcups Workers United. The rest of her group cheered and Starcups Corporate just shook their heads.

Finally, the NLRB agents gave the non-union workers ballots for the election. Once all the non-union workers voted, the NLRB agents announced the results. At Gardena, the final vote was 9-1 to be a union shop. There was a round of applause and hollering celebrating the win. Students do not always vote to be a union, but when it happens there is always a lot of excitement.

After the vote, we watched a news report on Starbucks organizing. The classroom — lively with conversation and laughter just three minutes ago — went silent. Students were surprised that fired Starbucks workers had not yet been given their jobs back despite the NLRB's support. I asked students to reflect on how their simulation experience connected to the real-world efforts of organizing workers with questions like "What are the obstacles to organizing a union?"

"Who is responsible for the obstacles workers face when organizing?" "What can be done to make certain that workers are more easily able to engage in the union organizing and election process?"

Students compared a chart from our first day of learning showing the steady decline of union membership in the United States over the last four decades to other charts that illustrated the incredible uptick in union elections and strikes over the last couple years.

"What do these new charts help us understand about workers and unions today?" I asked. Students talked about how there are no guaranteed wages and working conditions without a union contract in place. They discussed the power of workers coming together to make change for themselves. We talked about the role of consumers in the struggle for unionizing and winning a first contract.

Lingering students talked about how much more they wanted to say in the town hall meeting after the bell rang. These young people were in middle school during the 2019 UTLA teachers' strike, watched university students go on strike last school year, and spent the 2023 summer witnessing the picket lines of SAG-AFTRA, UNITE HERE, and the WGA. This simulation, and others like it from the Young Workers Education Project, allow students to make sense of these movements and the underlying forces driving workers onto the streets.

In this role play, our conversations were about the issues facing workers at service jobs, the challenges of organizing a union, and the complexities of our economy's obsession for ever-increasing profit margins that come with a very human cost. Students walked away with a deeper understanding of their rights as workers and the incredible organizing at some of the most ubiquitous global corporations.

As a former union organizer, I am familiar with the struggle of folks trying to even get to the point of holding an NLRB election at their workplace. As a veteran social studies teacher, I see the deep value in students engaging with this experience as they learn history, economics, and civics. More than 20 years ago, Linda Tubach and Patty Litwin developed the Collective Bargaining Education Project, a curriculum that directly addressed issues of power, justice, and conflict resolution in the workplace. Their thick binder of innovative pedagogy brought history and modern issues to life through rigorous simulations and role plays. As director of the Collective Bargaining Education Project, now known as the Young Workers Education Project, I turned to refreshing their curriculum. The Starbucks workers inspired this first new NLRB election simulation.

While writing this learning activity, I worked with a group of veteran teachers and newer facilitators who provided insights and offered additions that enriched the simulation. Most classroom teachers work in self-protective or system-created silos that prevent this type of collaboration from happening at our school sites. Professional development for teachers typically happens far away from our classrooms. Working with this team of educators was exciting and reminded me of the incredible work that can be done when we have the time and support to braid together content, skills, and joy for student learning.

This is critical learning. Our students deserve to know their rights as workers. They deserve access to the resources that will support their safety and fair treatment. Simulations and role plays give students a taste of the conflicts they may experience as employees or management with the concrete knowledge and practice to address these issues. The Young Workers Education Project is an example of how we can create brilliant moments of play that allow students to build courage, engage in rigorous thinking, and have the tough conversations that can lead to progress. ●

Thank you to the following teachers and facilitators for their feedback on the Starcups Workers United simulation: LAUSD classroom teachers Rabiya Kassam-Clay and Layla Santizo along with UCLA Labor Center educators Janna Shadduck-Hernandez, Jazmin Rivera, Emely Rauda, and Abbie Cohen.

Teaching materials are posted with the digital version of this article at rethinkingschools.org.

The Young Workers Education Project has also developed a five-day learning cycle to support implementation of AB 800, a new California law passed in October 2023. AB 800 requires all California secondary schools to educate students seeking work permits, along with junior year and senior year students, about their rights in the workplace. It is the culmination of decades of work by educators and labor leaders. Young people — particularly young people of color and immigrant youth — are vulnerable at their jobs, especially given the rising number of child labor violations in various industries.

The five-day AB 800 learning cycle is intended for teachers and students to use during Workplace Readiness Week, a component of AB 800 scheduled during the first week of May. The learning cycle poses a series of five questions to students: Why do workers have rights? What are the rights of workers? How were those rights established? What happens if these rights are violated? How do workers protect and enforce these rights?

The lessons draw upon existing resources available at the California Federation of Teachers' website, the UCLA Labor Center, and the role plays and simulations of the Young Workers Education Project. The week ends with students creating memes based on their learning to share on school social media accounts to inform younger students and the wider community about their rights in the workplace.


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Why We Need to Teach the History of the Environmental Justice Movement

By Tim Swinehart

When I began teaching an Environmental Justice class, part of my opening unit on the history of environmentalism included clips from one of the only documentaries I could find, *A Fierce Green Fire: The Battle for a Living Planet*. Although the film was broadcast on PBS for Earth Day, I knew that it overrepresented white male voices from the environmental movement — so I asked students to raise questions about the stories cut short or left out. I paused the film for discussion after a short section on the birth of the environmental justice movement bizarrely transitions to a montage of shirtless hippies plowing land and building geodesic domes. Although it's been several years, I still recall students' indignation that these two stories — the struggle of Black activists in Warren County, North Carolina, who put their bodies on the line to block toxic waste trucks from entering their community, and

ILLUSTRATION: RICARDO LEVINS MORALES

the "back-to-the-land" movement of middle-class white people whose privilege allowed them to "drop out" of society and commune with the land — were both celebrated in the film for their seemingly comparable contributions to the environmental movement. My students' frustration with the film reflects an increasing awareness I've noticed in their willingness to connect race, class, and environmental issues. Unfortunately, much of the curriculum available to K–12 educators has not followed suit.

This raises important questions about which versions of environmentalism we want students to encounter in our classrooms. There is a rich history of multiracial, community-based environmental organizing in the United States — exemplified by the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in 1991 — but this is entirely lost in textbooks that present environmentalism as the work of scientists, politicians, and large conservation organizations primarily focused on the protection of nature. Most high school U.S. history textbooks tell a story of environmentalism that erases both grassroots organizing and communities of color from the movement: Students read that Rachel Carson's warnings about DDT in her 1962 book *Silent Spring* prompted "national awareness" of pollution, which then blossomed into an outpouring of 20 million people for the first Earth Day in 1970, and ultimately led to bipartisan government action under the Nixon administration, including the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency. In this textbook success story, the environmental concerns of specific communities during the same era — Latinx farmworkers organizing against the health effects of pesticides in California in the 1960s, as just one example — are lost in universal language about the problems facing "Americans" and "the nation" at large.

Textbooks further erase Black and Brown communities when describing generalized "damage to the environment," ignoring human and ecological sacrifice zones that have long been a calculated risk of capitalist production, based on decisions that certain communities will bear the consequences of pollution more than others. Instead, textbooks like Holt McDougal's *The Americans* present flat, universal truths about "the widespread realization that pollution and overconsumption were damaging the environment" and how "many Americans realize[d] that their everyday behavior, as well as the nation's industrial growth, had a damaging effect on the environment."

A similarly uninspired presentation of environmental organizing also shows up in Savvas' (formerly Pearson's) description of the first Earth Day in 1970 in its *U.S. History*. After reading that Sen. Gaylord Nelson "played the leading role in organizing the protest," the textbook asserts that "the yearly event attracted the support of many of the same people who had advocated civil and women's rights." This one phrase — "many of the same people" — is as close as the text comes to suggesting that communities of color engaged with environmental issues. Given the usual list of environmental "activists" in textbooks — including Rachel Carson, Sen. Gaylord Nelson, members of the Sierra Club, and even President Richard Nixon — students are left to assume that environmental issues are primarily the concern of middle- or ruling-class white people.

This is also a missed opportunity by the authors of *U.S. History* to make more nuanced connections between the mainstream environmental movement of the 1960s and '70s and the organizers of the American Indian Movement and Black Panthers storied in previous chapters. But digging into nuanced versions of environmentalism would mean asking hard questions about the "nature first" approach of mainstream conservation organizations, of which Black Panther Party founder Huey Newton offered this critique: "Human beings are the component left out of the survival equation by the environmentalists except . . . as objects of blame for the whole mess in the industrialized countries and, of course, as suicidal breeders in the colonies."

The thinly veiled racism of campaigns for "zero population growth" directed at poor countries in the Global South in the 1960s and '70s, the disregard of Greenpeace animal rights activists for Indigenous people's traditions of seal and whale hunting, and the anti-immigrant policies of the Sierra Club in the 1980s and '90s are all examples of environmentalism rooted in white supremacy. And while the Sierra Club, Greenpeace, and other organizations have worked for decades to repair harm from these actions and policies, the legacy of an environmentalism that pitted the "protection of nature" against the concerns and needs of human communities — especially working-class communities and communities of color most harmed by environmental injustice — is still with us. It's a legacy captured in the opening line of *A Fierce Green Fire*, when the narrator Robert Redford announces gravely to viewers that "[t]he environmental movement is about nature versus humanity."

Redefining the Environment

This kind of thinking was explicitly rejected when activists gathered in 1991 at the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit to articulate a vision of environmental justice and galvanize a national movement in its defense. Reflecting on the significance of the summit 30 years later, participant Susana Almanza, the co-founder of People Organized in Defense of Earth and Her Resources, shared this:

> [At the summit] we talked about the interconnectedness between nature and humanity, it was interlocked, interwoven, and couldn't be separated. The environmental justice movement was powerful because we redefined what the environment was — it was not just nature, it was nature and humanity together. I think that was one

of the biggest successes we had as people of color, working together to redefine the environment.

Redefining the environment to include humanity may not sound like radical work to students today, but as an explicit repeal of the white supremacy ingrained in the environmental movement at the time, this was a call to action. On the third day of the summit, Dana Alston — a member of the event's planning committee — delivered a blunt speech directed at the representatives from mainstream majority-white environmental organizations invited to attend:

> For us, the issues of the environment do not stand alone by themselves. They are not narrowly defined. Our vision of the environment is woven into an overall framework of social, racial, and economic justice. It is deeply rooted in our cultures and our spirituality. It is based in a long tradition and understanding and respect for the natural world. The environment, for us, is where we live, where we work, and where we play.

This is the environmentalism I try to center in my curriculum — one that explicitly makes the nuanced connections glossed over by textbooks between racial, economic, and environmental justice. This is an environmentalism that is comprehensive enough to connect the well-being of all human communities and the well-being of the natural world, because they are not separate entities, something captured in the first of the Principles of Environmental Justice articulated at the summit: "Environmental Justice affirms the sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity and the interdependence of all species, and the right to be free from ecological destruction."

The principles also demonstrate an environmentalism rooted in the grassroots organizing of communities who demand "the fundamental right to political, economic, cultural, and environmental self-determination of all peoples (EJ Principle #5)." This led to a vision of environmental justice at the summit that calls for an end to the destructive consequences of militarism and occupation, the capitalist exploitation of workers, and the production of all toxins, hazardous wastes, and radioactive materials. As Alston argued in her speech, this is not an environmentalism narrowly defined.

Social Movement Organizing

The Principles of Environmental Justice have been a mainstay reading in my classroom for years, but I've only recently begun to learn about and appreciate the full extent of the social movement organizing that went into producing the one-page document that we read aloud each fall. Written more than 30 years ago, the 17 principles are as relevant today as they were in 1991, when they were presented as the culmination of the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in Washington, D.C., attended by hundreds of delegates representing communities, organizations, and tribes from every U.S. state, Puerto Rico, Mexico, Chile, and the Marshall Islands. The continued significance of the principles is a testament to the careful work and vision of summit organizers, who invited a diverse group of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian American, and Pacific Islander community activists to share struggles with environmental racism, to learn from and strategize with one another, and to participate in the four-day process of adopting the principles that would redefine the environmental movement.

The summit was organized at a moment when the environmental movement was in critical need of transformation — even if the biggest U.S. environmental organizations didn't recognize this at the

time. Groups like the Sierra Club and the Wilderness Society were waging legal battles and campaigns against the Reagan administration's attempts to defund the Environmental Protection Agency and roll back many of the environmental protections enacted during the previous two decades. This right-wing anti-environmental movement is all but celebrated in *U.S. History*, which explains in detail the rationale of "many people" who "complained that environmental regulations stripped individuals . . . of their property rights" and "worried that too much environmental regulation would hamper business and jobs by diverting funds to cleaning up the air and water." While giving space to the classic "jobs vs. the environment" red herring, the textbook fails to mention anything about the environmental justice movement that was growing in communities across the country at the same time.

One document that can help students glimpse the extraordinary activism of environmental justice groups that led to the 1991 summit is a letter written one year prior by Richard Moore of the New Mexico-based SouthWest Organizing Project (SWOP). The SWOP letter highlights the disconnect between mainstream environmental groups and communities of color and is signed by 100 community activists, artists, academics, and religious leaders — all people of color — from the American Southwest and beyond. The SWOP letter was sent to the executive directors of the "Group of 10" mainstream environmental organizations — the Sierra Club, Natural Resources Defense Council, Environmental Defense Fund, National Audubon Society, and Wilderness Society, among others — and opens by raising "concerns about the role of your organization and other national environmental groups in communities of people in the Southwest." The SWOP letter outlines a litany of "racist and genocidal practices" endured by Southwest communities of color, including centuries of land theft, resource extraction by mining companies that poisoned the land and water, nuclear testing and radioactive contamination by the U.S. military, and industrial and municipal waste dumps intentionally located in communities of color across the region. Not only had mainstream environmental organizations largely ignored these issues for decades — at times they had made them worse. The SWOP letter continues:

> Although environmental organizations calling themselves the "Group of 10" often claim to represent our interests, in observing your activities it has become clear to us that your organizations play an equal role in the disruption of our communities. . . . [You] continue to support and promote policies that emphasize the clean-up and preservation of the environment on the backs of working people in general and people of color in particular.

One of several examples included in the SWOP letter is the 1987 creation of El Malpais National Monument in New Mexico, which dispossessed the Indigenous Acoma Pueblo of 13,000 acres of ancestral land but was nonetheless supported by the Sierra Club and Wilderness Society "in complete disregard of the cultural heritage of the Acoma people."

Racism and Environmental Activism

When Dana Alston spoke directly to representatives of the major environmental organizations at the 1991 summit, she argued that "the boards of directors of some of the environmental organizations are the very companies that we are struggling against." Here again is important language from the SWOP letter:

> Group of 10 organizations are being supported by corporations such as ARCO, British Petroleum, Chemical Bank, GTE, General Electric, Dupont, Dow Chemical, Exxon, IBM, Coca-Cola, and Waste Management Incorporated. Several of these companies are known polluters whose disregard for the safety and well-being of workers has resulted in the deaths of many people of color. It is impossible for you to represent us in issues of our own survival when you are accountable to these interests. Such accountability leads you to pursue a corporate strategy toward the resolution of the environmental crisis, when what is needed is a people's strategy that fully involves those who have historically been without power in this society.

The SWOP letter and Alston's speech again offer examples of the environmentalism I want students to encounter in my classes, while also providing critical context for reading the Principles of Environmental Justice that came out of the summit. On their own, the principles

are remarkable — I've been using them for years as a stand-alone reading — but without context students sometimes describe them as "great, but too idealistic." This is perhaps because the principles lack the typical "compromise" between "the economy" and "the environment" students read about in textbooks like *U.S. History*. Take for example the uncompromising approach to toxins spelled out in Principle #6: "Environmental Justice demands the cessation of the production of all toxins, hazardous wastes, and radioactive materials, and that all past and current producers be held strictly accountable to the people for detoxification and the containment at the point of production." This is not the incremental environmentalism of "calculated risk" and "allowable pollution limits" championed by the big green groups and influenced by polluters for most of the 20th century, nor is this the toothless environmentalism on display year after year at United Nations' climate conferences awash in fossil fuel lobbyists. Instead, EJ Principle #6 demands that as a society we stop producing toxic substances entirely and repair the harm done to people and communities by the production of these substances in the past.

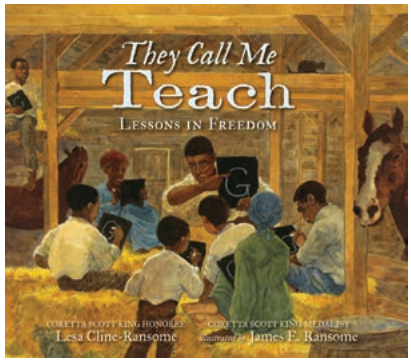
I've seen an increasing frustration from students with forms of environmentalism that rightly seem to them to lack the urgency and seriousness to match the ecological and social crises they see around them. I've also heard from students that this frustration is reinforced by the inevitable yet embarrassingly inadequate lists of individual "actions" that so often conclude the environmental lessons they have encountered throughout their years in school. Although offering these individual actions is likely a well-intentioned effort by teachers to offer students hope, it's time that we recognize their failure as a response to the enormity of today's social and ecological crises. To return to the imagery from *A Fierce Green Fire*, these individual "solutions" are more in line with the white, middle-class environmentalism of the back-to-the-landers than the interconnected struggle for racial, economic, and environmental justice defined by activists in Warren County. Buying organic food and green consumer products, driving an electric car, or even riding a bike all depend on a person's privilege and ability to engage in such actions. Given this menu of options, I'm not surprised to hear an increasing sense of climate fatalism from students — the notion that humans are too selfish and greedy to take serious action in response to the climate crisis — which shares a sense of cynicism with earlier movements that deemed society so broken that the best response was to drop out and move to the country.

We live, and teach, in a moment that requires a more radical, transformative approach to environmentalism than most K–12 curricula have to offer — but we're not without historical examples of what an uncompromising environmentalism, rooted in community and principles of racial and economic justice, can look like. And it's not just this moment that requires we teach these stories of hopeful organizing for environmental justice, it's also what students increasingly expect and demand in their calls for climate justice education and a Green New Deal for Schools from school boards across the country. As young people make demands for climate justice it's common for them to decry the failure of adults to act, which is in many ways deserved — but this is true only if we ignore the history of the activism and organizing that laid the foundations upon which today's climate movement is built. Youth climate activist Jerome Foster, founder of OneMillionOfUs, shared this perspective during a 30th anniversary celebration of the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit:

> The history and the legacy of this conference is woven into the fabric of the youth climate movement; it is just foundational in how we operate. Even though a lot of young people today may not understand where that legacy comes from, it was the architects [at the summit] who ushered in the understanding of what climate justice actually means. Some people say, "Oh, the past is just full of inaction." No, it's not full of inaction. It's full of unheard people. . . . We just have to use that legacy and that knowledge and put that into practice.

As teachers, we would do well to heed Jerome's call, to lift up the stories of unheard activists, like the organizers of the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, to teach this legacy as a way of breathing hope into our curriculum, and allowing students to learn from the radicalism and uncompromising approach of these historical leaders who were, despite the best efforts of textbooks to erase them, a transformative force that forever changed the environmental movement. ●

Tim Swinehart (timswinehart@gmail.com) teaches at Lincoln High School in Portland, Oregon. He co-edited A People's Curriculum for the Earth: Teaching Climate Change and the Environmental Crisis.



Picture Book

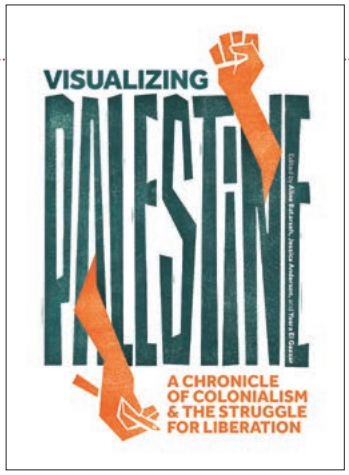
They Call Me Teach: Lessons in Freedom
By Lesa Cline-Ransome
Illustrated by James E. Ransome
(Candlewick Press, 2024)
40 pp.

Pithy verse and rich watercolor details introduce young readers to literacy as enslaved resistance in this picture book. An urgent yet straightforward first-person account, this book shows how one enslaved man, secretly named Teach, helps others learn to read and write wherever he can — in a stable, in a kitchen, in the dirt, at a log cabin church. Organized by the days of the week, as store clerk on Saturday, Teach recounts: "I write up receipts/ for Master's deliveries/ . . . In 'tween/ I write up a receipt/ for her freedom." This picture book will spark discussions about enslavement, literacy as resistance, and courage. At the back, there is an author's note that offers context on African American resistance to enslavement through education along with a list of more books on resistance.

Curriculum

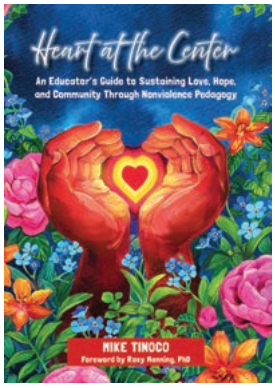
Visualizing Palestine
Edited by Aline Batarseh, Jessica Anderson, and Yosra El Gazzar
(Haymarket Books, 2024)
376 pp.

In the spring 2024 issue of *Rethinking Schools*, we recommended the valuable website of Visualizing Palestine, a nonprofit "dedicated to using data and research to visually communicate Palestinian experiences to provoke narrative change." In line with this mission, Visualizing Palestine has drawn on material



from their website and more to offer a graphic and student-friendly portrayal of Palestinian social reality in book form. Every page offers a visual story of life in Palestine and Israel. One water faucet graphic reveals the water inequality between Israel — 230 liters per person/per day — and Israeli genocide-stricken Gaza: three liters per person/per day. This, for people's basic needs of hydration, cooking, and hygiene. Historical graphics illustrate instances of resistance, comparing hunger strikes in apartheid South Africa and apartheid Palestine-Israel. Not only do the illustrations in *Visualizing Palestine* teach students about the unequal and deadly relationship between Israel and Palestine, teachers can also use the graphics as prompts for students to create their own data-informed posters — about other countries or other eras. It is hard to overemphasize what a useful resource this book is.

Heart at the Center: An Educator's Guide to Sustaining Love, Hope, and Community Through Nonviolence Pedagogy
By Mike Tinoco
(Routledge, 2025)
335 pp.



Part autobiography, part narrative, part workbook, and part textbook, Mike Tinoco's *Heart at the Center* uses nonviolence pedagogy as a springboard for developing classroom practices that support thriving students and sustainable teaching. Chock full of images, student work, self-reflective activities, and stories about teaching and learning, *Heart at the Center* offers an important and unique contribution to understanding teaching for social justice.

The Message
By Ta-Nehisi Coates
(One World, 2024)
232 pp.

Coates' wonderful new book is ostensibly composed as an essay for his Howard University writing students — addressed as "Comrades" — fulfilling a two-year old promise to do the work that he had assigned them. Drawn on three trips — to Senegal, South Carolina, and Palestine — *The Message* is an expansive meditation on writing and politics. But in describing what it means to be a writer, Coates also articulates what it means to be a teacher through many astute quotes and valuable lessons: "Great canons angle toward great power, and the great privilege of great power is an incuriosity about those who lack it." Teachers: Create a curriculum of curiosity about the oppressed. "History is not inert but contains within it a story that implicates or justifies political order." Teachers: Your history curriculum should interrogate and critique the political order. The attack on anti-racist teaching "works not simply to misinform but to miseducate; not just to assure the right answers are memorized but that the wrong questions are never asked." Teachers: Create a curriculum of "wrong questions," whose exploration will illuminate the structures and ideas that stifle equality. The book's final section chronicles Coates' trip to Palestine. His gaze is informed by a lifetime of thinking and writing about racial injustice: "For as sure as my ancestors were born into a country where none of them

was the equal of any white man, Israel was revealing itself to be a country where no Palestinian is ever the equal of any Jewish person anywhere." The punchline of Coates' trips to Senegal, South Carolina, and Palestine is also a message about teachers' responsibility to teach honestly and fearlessly: We are "tasked with nothing less than saving the world."

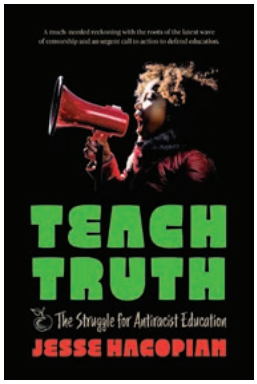
Activism

New Voices Campaigns
Student Press Law Center
newvoices@splc.org

Since 1974, the Student Press Law Center has worked to "promote, support, and defend the First Amendment and press freedom rights of high school and college journalists and their advisors." That work became tougher after the Supreme Court restricted students' free speech rights in its 1988 *Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier* decision. Recently, SPLC's New Voices campaigns, led by student journalists and youth advocates, have succeeded in passing laws that seek to reverse *Hazelwood*'s impact. Last May, Minnesota became the 18th state to pass such a law. The measure says that "public 6th- through 12th-grade student journalists determine the content published in school-sponsored student media and [the law] protects them from censorship except in certain rare circumstances. The law also shields student media advisors from professional retaliation for refusing to unlawfully censor their students' work." Similar legislation is pending in nine states and six more have New Voices teams working to introduce such bills. To learn the status of efforts in your state or to get involved, contact SPLC's New Voices Advocacy and Organizing Team at newvoices@splc.org.

From Rethinking Schools Editors and Writers

Teach Truth
By Jesse Hagopian
(Haymarket Books, 2025)
285 pp.

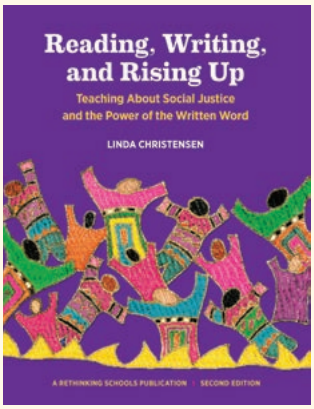


Rethinking Schools editor Jesse Hagopian's *Teach Truth* is a manifesto to defend education from the billionaires and bigots. Hagopian movingly chronicles today's relentless — and sometimes violent — attacks on teaching with a conscience. (No doubt about to become much worse.) This is a story of elites desperate to use schools to legitimate race and class privilege — and ultimately to discredit and defund public education. Hagopian gives us language to describe the pushback to anti-racist education and what it means to be a truth-teacher during difficult times. At the heart of *Teach Truth* are the stories of courageous students and educators determined to make schools sites of curiosity, equality, and justice. The book is sharp, story-rich, and carefully researched. Hagopian's *Teach Truth* is a warning — but also a song of hope and a call to action.

Low: Notes on Art & Trash
By Jaydra Johnson
(Fonograf, 2024)
147 pp.

"I hope I never become inured to violence," Jaydra Johnson writes toward the end of her magnificent first book. Johnson is a language arts teacher, artist, poet, and *Rethinking Schools* contributor. *Low* is a collection of essays — part autobiography, part prose poem, part critique of the lives and stuff that we discard, hide, and destroy too easily. "I was very young, perhaps 7 or 8 years old," she writes, "when I came to understand that I was not just bad, but a special kind of bad. I was trash." In wrenchingly honest, intimate storytelling, Johnson explores the violence of how schools, the criminal justice system, and a capitalist economy turn human beings into trash. But she also celebrates how art can reveal and resist.

Reviewed by Bill Bigelow, Elizabeth Barbian, Wayne Au, Stan Karp, and Cierra Kaler-Jones



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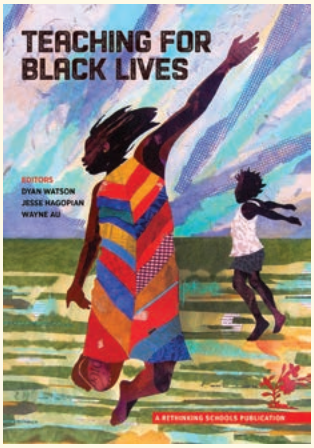

Teaching for Black Lives

Edited by Dyan Watson, Jesse Hagopian, and Wayne Au

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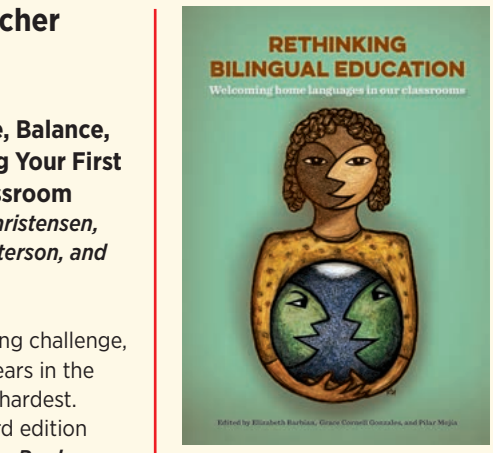

Rethinking Bilingual Education

Welcoming Home Languages in Our Classrooms

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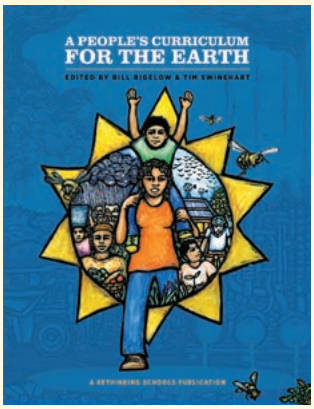

A People's Curriculum for the Earth

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Edited by Bill Bigelow and Tim Swinehart

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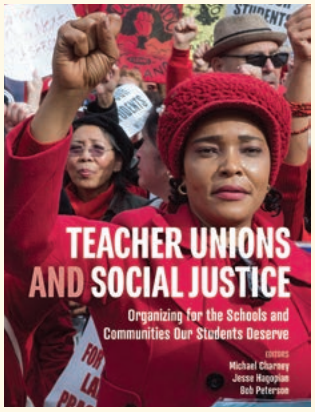

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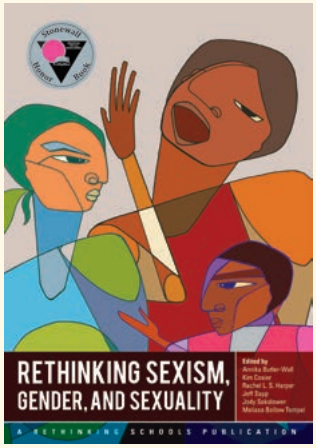

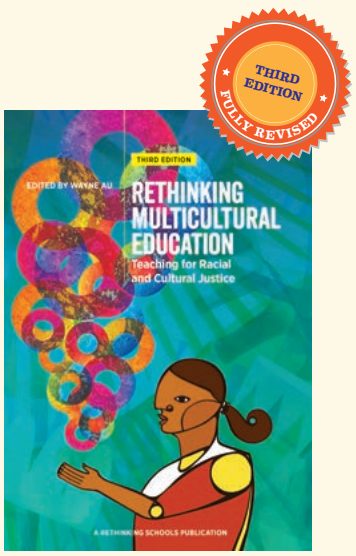

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Teaching for Climate Justice: My Top 10 List

By Bill Bigelow

The first article that Rethinking Schools published about the climate crisis was in 2002, Bill McKibben's "Global Warming: The Environmental Issue from Hell," in Bob Peterson's and my book *Rethinking Globalization*. Back then, not all teachers and students were convinced that climate change was real — "the science is sound," McKibben felt compelled to assert in his article.

As I write, Hurricane Beryl is ravaging Texas, and for the past week temperatures have hovered around 100 degrees in my home of Portland, Oregon, yesterday hitting 104. I hate the phrase the new normal, because it sounds like we accept the unacceptable, but at this point, we need to

acknowledge that the climate emergency is a permanent fact of life. Permanent, but not unchangeable: How activists and educators respond to the unfolding crisis will determine the quality — and the fairness — of life for generations to come.

These days, "climate justice" gets thrown around as if we all know what we mean by it. My friend and colleague Mimi Eisen teases me that I am an honorary millennial, as I like to structure articles in list formats, which Mimi tells me is a millennial thing. Because "climate justice" is so frequently used and mangled, I offer here my top 10 elements of a climate justice curriculum:

PHOTO: JOE BRUSKY

1. We must teach the climate crisis not as a product of greed, bad corporations, or overconsumption, but of the capitalist system itself. When we think about the deafening silences in the mainstream curriculum, one of the most significant of these is the failure to teach young people to think *systemically*. Blaming greed, corporate malfeasance, or a lust for stuff may feel righteous and defiant, but it does not equip students to think intelligently about the profit system whose inevitable consequence is climate chaos.

2. Central to climate justice teaching is equipping students to understand environmental racism. Zambian climate activist Veronica Mulenga puts it succinctly: "Historical and present-day injustices have both left Black, Indigenous, and people-of-color communities exposed to far greater environmental health hazards than white communities. Those most affected by climate change are Black and poor communities." Whether it is whose voices we include in our curriculum, whose lives and which regions we focus on, or how we analyze climate consequences and potential solutions, we always need to probe how racism is implicated.

3. A climate justice curriculum focuses on the historic roots of the crisis in colonialism, slavery, extractivism. Mimi Eisen and Ursula Wolfe-Rocca underscore this curricular imperative in the title of an important article: "The Climate Crisis Has a History. Teach It." The seeds of the crisis can be found at least as far back as Columbus' arrival in the Americas and his extractivist orientation that regarded everything, whether alive or inanimate, as a potential source of wealth. When students know this history, they can recognize patterns of power that continue to shape the climate crisis — and that need to be challenged.

4. Climate justice takes an internationalist approach. It focuses on the impact of the crisis throughout the world — as well as the activist response. One of the first lessons that I developed about the climate crisis was a mixer that featured stories from people around the world who were affected by climate change — mostly people who were hurt by the changing climate, and often taking action, but some who were beneficiaries or part of causing it. In the first group of high school students I taught this to, one girl wrote that she was surprised that "people from all over the world are being affected." It is crucial that a climate justice curriculum be a curriculum of global solidarity: The life of everyone in the world counts.

5. A climate justice curriculum critiques individualism as a solution to climate chaos. Young people learn early to think about individual solutions to solve social and environmental problems: recycle more, drive less, take shorter showers, buy local, reduce your carbon footprint. As personal virtues, these are admirable. As a *strategy* for confronting the gathering climate emergency, they are useless. A climate justice curriculum not only avoids the promotion of individualism, it also explicitly critiques false solutions promoted by those whose interests are threatened by more radical and effective measures.

6. Instead, students learn that meaningful social change is the product of social movements. A key question a climate justice curriculum addresses is: How do societies change? Change is not made by elites with a stake in the relations of wealth and power that keep them at the top. Nor is it made by the individual choices of consumers. A climate justice curriculum centers popular movements that have sought to transform social relations and make lasting change — from the abolition movement to the

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labor movement to the Civil Rights Movement. A climate justice curriculum needn't always focus on the climate; exploring the means to collectively challenge injustice of all kinds also addresses the climate crisis.

7. Climate justice teaching reaches beyond the immediate causes and consequences of climate change. Climate justice requires us to help students explore the intersection of a host of crises and issues that at first might not occur to people — the genocide in Gaza, Indigenous rights, labor activism, nuclear testing. As the Visualizing Palestine graphic "No War, No Warming" illustrates, the U.S. military is the world's leading institutional fossil fuel user, with 48 million tons of emissions in 2022 — and Israel, the largest recipient of U.S. military aid, has an even higher per capita spending on the military than the United States. Not only has Israel's war on Gaza resulted in unspeakable suffering, but the climate crisis compounds people's misery: According to climate-refugees.org, Gaza suffers from "more frequent and increased cold snaps in winter months and temperatures rising 20 percent faster than anywhere else in the world." The climate crisis touches — and is touched by — everything. We need to surface these connections with students.

8. A climate justice curriculum is problem-posing, participatory, playful, critical. The "justice" piece of climate justice is not only about the content of the curriculum, but also concerns how we approach our students. Through role plays, simulations, critical reading and writing activities, and "make a difference in the world" projects, we need to respect them as intellectuals, capable of wrestling with all the historical, political, scientific, and moral issues embedded in the climate crisis. Climate justice must be pedagogical justice.

9. Climate justice teaching happens in all disciplines, not just in science classes. In Portland, Oregon, when we launched our Portland Public Schools Climate Justice Committee in 2016, school district authorities immediately placed our committee under the auspices of the science administrator — without asking anyone on the committee. It was assumed that climate = science. And it does. But climate change is also a health issue. Social studies classes need to center the causes, consequences, and potential solutions to the crisis. Language arts classes should feature climate poetry, fiction, essays, personal narrative. Engineering, art, math, music — all disciplines "own" the climate crisis. Teachers need to challenge curricular silos whenever administrators force us to climb into them.

10. To be a climate justice educator is to be an activist educator. We are part of a global community of climate justice educators who are not only reimagining our own classrooms, but who are reaching out to colleagues to invite them to join the movement. We can write, speak, tell stories, join webinars. But the most effective outreach to other teachers may be when we show, engage, model climate justice curriculum. Participants in our workshops need to say to themselves, "Ah, I see what this can look like." Climate justice educators create space to imagine what this work entails in different disciplines, grade levels, and communities.

When I was in high school in the San Francisco Bay Area, I used to listen to Scoop Nisker report the news on KSAN radio. He ended every broadcast with "If you don't like the news, go out and make some of your own." The climate news these days is bad. As climate justice educators, let's go make some of our own. ●

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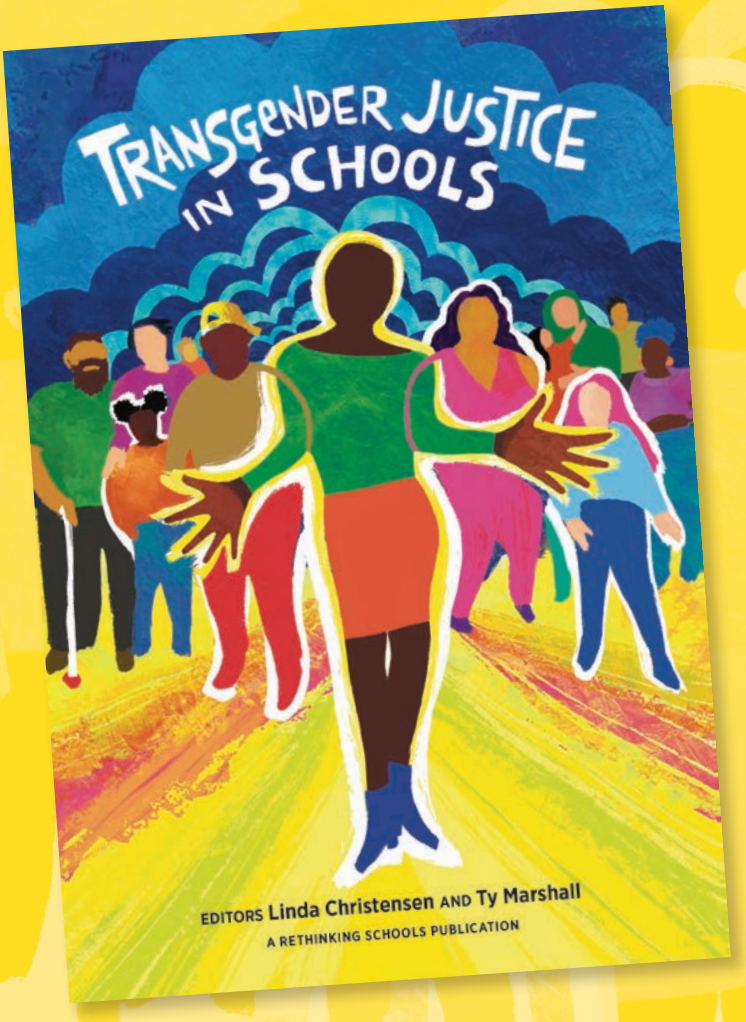
Transgender Justice in Schools

EDITORS Linda Christensen AND Ty Marshall



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